



**DEBATES**  
OF THE  
LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY  
FOR THE  
AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

**DAILY HANSARD**

Edited proof transcript

24 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 **Monday, 7 July 2025**.

## Tuesday, 24 June 2025

ACT Policing—strategic asset management plan—order to table documents—update .....	1765
Leave of Absence.....	1765
Petitions:	
Off-leash dog areas—Point Hut Dog Exercise Area—petition 27-25.....	1766
Trees—tree-removal guidelines—petition 11-25 .....	1767
Roads—Woodberry Avenue, Coombs—parking—petition 30-25 .....	1767
Motor vehicles—left-hand drive vehicles—petition 48-24.....	1768
Ministerial responses .....	1768
Hawker, Page and Scullin—police presence—petitions 46-24 and 16-25...	1768
Building and construction—regulation—petition 8-25 .....	1773
Macquarie—swimming pool—petitions 49-24 and 10-25 .....	1778
Burrangiri Aged Care Respite Centre—petition 5-25 .....	1780
Motion to take note of petitions:	
Off-leash dog areas—Point Hut Dog Exercise Area—petition 27-25.....	1782
Trees—tree-removal guidelines—petition 11-25 .....	1783
Off-leash dog areas—Point Hut Dog Exercise Area—petition 27-25.....	1783
Motor vehicles—left-hand drive vehicles—petition 48-24.....	1784
Roads—Woodberry Avenue, Coombs—parking—petition 30-25 .....	1786
Macquarie—swimming pool—petitions 49-24 and 10-25 .....	1787
Hawker, Page and Scullin—police presence—petitions 46-24 and 16-25...	1787
Trees—tree-removal guidelines—petition 11-25 .....	1788
Off-leash dog areas—Point Hut Dog Exercise Area—petition 27-25.....	1788
Trees—tree-removal guidelines—petition 11-25 .....	1790
China Trade Mission (Ministerial statement) .....	1791
Evelyn Scott Preschool—Excellent National Quality Framework rating (Ministerial statement) .....	1793
Age-Friendly City Plan 2020-2024—fifth annual report (Ministerial statement) ...	1794
Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence 2025 (Ministerial statement) .....	1797
Standing orders—suspension.....	1802
Child care—early childhood education and care incident reports—order to table documents.....	1803
Government projects—business cases and cost-benefit analyses—order to table documents.....	1814
Road projects—benefit-cost analyses—order to table documents .....	1819
Ministerial arrangements .....	1820
Questions without notice:	
Government—performance .....	1821
Business—regulatory impact.....	1822
ACT Policing—resourcing .....	1823
Visitors.....	1824
Questions without notice:	
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples—Yhurwun Bullan program.	1824
Elective surgery—waiting lists.....	1825
Elective surgery—waiting lists.....	1826
Schools—infrastructure .....	1827
Schools—infrastructure .....	1828
Budget—vocational education and training .....	1830
Woden—infrastructure .....	1831

Transport Canberra—MyWay+—retail outlets.....	1832
Fossil Fuel Non-Proliferation Treaty.....	1832
ACT Policing—police stations.....	1834
Sport and recreation—Tuggeranong ice sports facility.....	1836
Energy—Big Canberra Battery .....	1837
Supplementary answers to questions without notice:	
Woden—infrastructure .....	1838
Schools—infrastructure .....	1838
Papers.....	1838
Leave of absence.....	1841
Richardson—shops .....	1841
Health care—access to specialists .....	1862
Motion to take note of papers .....	1873
Legal Affairs—Standing Committee .....	1873
Environment, Planning, Transport and City Services—Standing Committee.....	1873
Integrity Commission and Statutory Office Holders—Standing Committee .....	1874
Public Accounts and Administration—Standing Committee .....	1875
Appropriation Bill 2025-2026.....	1875
Appropriation (Office of the Legislative Assembly) Bill 2025-2026.....	1885
Statements by members:	
Richardson—shops .....	1885
Health—scleroderma .....	1886
Planning and development—former CSIRO Ginninderra site .....	1886
Adjournment:	
Mrs Wendy Altamore—tribute.....	1887
Energy—fossil fuels .....	1888
McKellar—shops.....	1890
Education—civics and citizenship.....	1891

**Tuesday, 24 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.

### **ACT Policing—strategic asset management plan—order to table documents—update**

Pursuant to standing order 213A and the resolution of the Assembly of 9 April 2025, the Clerk tabled the following documents:

ACT Policing—Strategic asset management planning—Documents—Order to table—Copy of—

Index of returned documents.

Privilege claimed on certain returned documents—Letter to the Clerk from the Chief Minister, dated 2025.

ACT Policing 20 Year Master Accommodation Plan, prepared by ACT Policing, March 2022 – Update.

Justice and Community Safety Directorate—2019-20 Budget: Concept Brief.

Request for Infrastructure Project Services, undated.

Statement of Requirements—Strategic Asset Management Plan (SAMP) for ACT Policing on behalf of Justice and Community Safety Capital Works and Infrastructure, dated July 2019.

Strategic Asset Management Plan—ACT Policing, dated June 2024.

### **Leave of Absence**

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

That leave of absence be granted to Mr Pettersson for this sitting week due to illness.

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

That leave of absence be granted to Mr Milligan for this sitting week due to

personal reasons.

## Petitions

*The following petitions were lodged for presentation:*

### **Off-leash dog areas—Point Hut Dog Exercise Area—petition 27-25**

*By Ms Morris, from 1,172 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 imminent closure of Point Hut Dog Exercise Area following the opening of the Lanyon Dog Park.

The Point Hut Dog Exercise Area is one of Canberra's best kept secrets which is enjoyed daily by Lanyon locals exercising their dogs off lead. The new Lanyon Dog Park represents a 90% reduction in the open space enjoyed by dog lovers for many years. The current Point Hut Dog Exercise Area provides:

- Open space where dogs of all sizes already enjoy longer walks off leash.
- The ability to chase a ball thrown a reasonable distance.
- Pack-play or walks as a social group.
- Follow scents (important for canine mental stimulation).
- Healthy social interaction between dogs and their owners. The open space permits dogs to play together or if not feeling social can find their own space without interrupting or being interrupted by others. The new Lanyon Dog Park does not provide any of the benefits identified above,
- The small enclosures do not permit space for the number of dogs currently enjoying the Point Hut Dog Exercise Area.
- Splitting of the already small area into two yards makes it unusable and unsafe for the many large dogs currently utilising the Point Hut Dog Exercise Area.
- Constraining the current dog population to such a small area will cause anti-social behaviour amongst dogs and their owners.
- As the new facility will not serve the needs of the community, this encourages irresponsible dog ownership and the use of other public spaces such as school and sporting ovals. The ACT Government's plans to transition the area into an on-lead reserve will be a massive loss to the Tuggeranong community who have invested time and money into maintaining the area for the enjoyment of all locals and their dogs.

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

- Keep the existing Point Hut Dog Exercise Area as an off-leash dog area when the Lanyon Dog Park opens.

*Pursuant to standing order 99A, the petition, having at least 500 signatories, was*

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

### **Trees—tree-removal guidelines—petition 11-25**

*By Mr Parton, from 364 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: Current laws surrounding the removal of dangerous trees in the ACT are inadequate and often leave residents at great risk. When assessing the risk of dangerous trees there is not sufficient weight given to the actual risk to property and human life, and as the climate changes Canberra will be faced with more violent storms which will likely bring down many more dangerous trees.

Your petitioners, therefore, request the Assembly to:

- Lower the threshold at which the Government will act on a dangerous tree including giving as much consideration to the safety of property and human life as is given to the health of the tree.
- Simplify and quicken the process for the approval of minor works on dangerous trees in urgent circumstances.

### **Roads—Woodberry Avenue, Coombs—parking—petition 30-25**

*By Dr Paterson, from 59 residents:*

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

Residents of Woodberry Avenue in Coombs are experiencing significant parking congestion and safety issues due to poor street design that does not adequately accommodate medium- to high-density housing. The apartment block at the end of Woodberry Avenue contains over 140 apartments but includes only two visitor car parks. It directly faces a row of townhouses, intensifying local demand for street parking. In contrast, the other end of Woodberry Avenue—lined with low-density single homes—has carved-out parking bays, whereas this high-density section has none.

The lack of parking options is forcing residents and visitors to park on the narrow street and on the wide grass verges, leading to congestion, unsafe conditions for pedestrians, and limited access for emergency vehicles. Trees along the verge remain small and could potentially be relocated to facilitate inset parking. Additionally, a central traffic island that serves little purpose on this narrow street could be removed to increase usable space. This oversight in the original planning has failed to meet the practical needs of a growing population and must be rectified. Solutions like street widening or the addition of inset parking—both already used elsewhere in Coombs and across the ACT—should be urgently considered.

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

- Review parking arrangements along Woodberry development at 2 Woodberry Avenue and Pearlman Street in Coombs, particularly in areas where medium- to high-density developments are already in place or planned.
- Investigate and implement an appropriate inset parking to alleviate congestion, improve safety along Woodberry Avenue at 2 Woodberry Avenue.

### **Motor vehicles—left-hand drive vehicles—petition 48-24**

*By Mr Cain, from 195 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:

- a) Currently, the vehicle registration regulations only permit left-hand drive (LHD) vehicles in the ACT that are at least 30 years old to be registered, with exceptions only available for diplomats, foreign service personnel and test/evaluation vehicles.
- b) The current regulations prevent ACT residents from registering and driving modern LHD vehicles produced by foreign manufacturers, particularly electric, hybrid and hydrogen vehicles, which are produced in greater quantities than the equivalent RHD vehicles.
- c) Many other right-hand drive jurisdictions, such as the United Kingdom, Ireland, Japan and Malaysia, permit LHD vehicle registration, as does the Northern Territory.
- d) Permitting LHD vehicle registrations will encourage an acceleration of zero- and low-emission vehicles in the ACT and provide greater consumer choice for Canberrans.

Your petitioners, therefore, request the Assembly to call on the ACT Government to reform vehicle registration laws to allow the registration of left-hand drive vehicles of any age in the ACT.

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

### **Ministerial responses**

The following responses to petitions have been lodged:

#### **Hawker, Page and Scullin—police presence—petitions 46-24 and 16-25**

By **Dr Paterson**, Minister for Police, Fire and Emergency Services, undated, in response to a petition lodged by Mr Cain, on 8 April 2025, concerning police presence in Hawker, Page and Scullin.

*The response read as follows:*

Dear Mr Duncan

Thank you for your letter of 8 April 2025 regarding petitions E-PET 046-24 and PET 016-25, lodged by Mr Peter Cain MLA, and received by the Assembly on 8 April 2025. The petition requests the Assembly to call on the Government to increase police presence in the suburbs of Hawker, Page and Scullin to protect the residents from petty and preventable crimes.

Pursuant to Standing Order 100, this letter constitutes my response.

#### Community Engagement

ACT Policing is aware of the rise in community concern about crime affecting West Belconnen and routinely conducts policing patrols in all Belconnen suburbs. ACT Policing is working with areas of ACT Government, including ACT Housing and other support services, to identify issues of concern and respond appropriately.

To address concerns in the Belconnen region, ACT Policing has implemented the North District Community Engagement Strategy, which involves proactive high visibility patrolling, commercial and community engagement, resourcing, intelligence and data analytics.

Education and public messaging are important components of crime prevention, community safety and enhancing confidence in police. ACT Policing is committed to raising awareness of community safety through active engagement with the entire community and the delivery of effective safety messaging.

ACT Policing has been steadily increasing its community engagement activities. Over the past year, officers have attended and hosted numerous events in local Canberra shopping centres and cafes, engaging face-to-face and reinforcing ACT Policing's strong relationships with the Canberra community.

In July 2024, ACT Policing attended Kaleen Plaza and hosted Cop Pop-Up. Cop Pop-Up is a community engagement initiative that enables community members to meet some of their local police officers and ask any questions they might have about policing, community safety and crime prevention. ACT Policing will continue to host these events across the ACT in 2025 and can confirm Hawker, Page and Scullin are being considered to host the next Belconnen district event.

Alongside these initiatives, ACT Policing received more than 140 requests in 2024 to attend community events in a public engagement capacity. ACT Policing continues to facilitate officer attendance at these events as operational priorities allow, further demonstrating its commitment to strengthening relationships with the community.

ACT Policing works with its partner support agencies to identify and strategise how best to collaboratively address the social issues that often underpin anti-social behaviour before it becomes a recurring issue.

#### Crime Statistics

As at 30 April 2025, Hawker and Page are trending downwards overall in the rates of total offences being committed per 1,000 people so far in 2024-25. In Hawker, there were a total of 96.4 offences per 1,000 people in 2023-24, and 84.5 offences in 2024-25. In Page, total offences went from 42.1 offences per 1,000 people to 33.8 offences.



The rates of theft (22.8 to 18.1 per 1,000 people,) and assault (10.6 to 9.2 per 1,000 people,) in Hawker have also decreased since 2020.

The suburb of Scullin, however, has seen a small increase in the rate of total offences committed in the same time period, from 30.5 offences per 1,000 people to 39.7 offences. Scullin has seen a higher rate of crimes committed for offence types including property damage, assault, motor vehicle theft and burglary since 2023-24. However, the crime rates in Scullin remain low and remain lower than they were 5 years ago. Additionally, given the low crime rates, and small sample size, it is unclear whether the small increase from 2023-24 is statistically significant at this stage

OFFENCES COMMITTED IN HAWKER BETWEEN 2020-21 TO 2024-25 AS AT 30 APRIL					
Offence	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25 YTD
Assault	32	25	30	32	23
Sexual offences	7	5	2	1	6
Other offences against the person	3	3	4	3	1
Robbery	4	3	4	2	0
Burglary	17	16	17	14	13
Stolen Motor vehicle	15	14	11	10	8
Theft (excl motor vehicle theft)	69	57	72	68	45
Property damage	36	27	32	42	31
Other offences against property	12	20	41	12	11
Justice procedures	26	24	24	17	20
Firearms and weapons	2	1	3	3	3
Other offences against good order	6	3	5	9	3
Drug offences	0	0	2	2	0
Traffic Offences	123	44	41	42	46
Total	352	242	288	257	210

Source: PROMIS as at 9 May 2025

OFFENCES COMMITTED IN PAGE BETWEEN 2020-21 TO 2024-25 AS AT 30 APRIL					
Offence	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25 YTD

Homicide	3	0	0	0	0
Assault	22	10	20	9	11
Sexual offences	1	5	8	7	4
Other offences against the person	2	0	2	0	2
Robbery	1	0	0	0	0
Burglary	14	10	11	14	5
Stolen Motor vehicle	4	4	8	11	8
Theft (excl motor vehicle theft)	36	28	26	22	15
Property damage	35	17	27	19	7
Other offences against property	4	5	17	6	10
Justice procedures	15	3	6	15	8
Firearms and weapons	3	0	2	2	0
Other offences against good order	4	6	4	7	2
Drug offences	2	1	1	0	0
Traffic Offences	43	17	17	15	12
<b>Total</b>	<b>189</b>	<b>106</b>	<b>149</b>	<b>127</b>	<b>84</b>

Source: PROMIS as at 9 May 2025

**OFFENCES COMMITTED IN SCULLIN BETWEEN 2020-21 TO 2024-25 AS AT 30 APRIL**

<b>Offence</b>	<b>2020-21</b>	<b>2021-22</b>	<b>2022-23</b>	<b>2023-24</b>	<b>2024-25 YTD</b>
Assault	17	13	8	21	20
Sexual offences	17	1	1	0	2
Other offences against the person	5	1	1	2	2
Robbery	1	0	2	1	0
Burglary	8	4	16	7	9
Stolen Motor vehicle	7	6	7	5	7
Theft (excl motor vehicle theft)	20	18	23	21	17

Property damage	13	19	11	13	14
Other offences against property	7	11	8	7	3
Justice procedures	7	9	8	1	10
Firearms and weapons	0	1	0	0	1
Other offences against good order	1	1	0	2	3
Drug offences	1	0	0	0	0
Traffic Offences	46	22	4	14	10
Total	150	106	89	94	98

Source: PROMIS as at 9 May 2025

### Resources and ACT Policing response

The suburbs of Hawker, Page and Scullin are included in the Belconnen Patrol Zone which is serviced by ACT Policing officers from a broad range of areas including (but not limited to) General Duties, Proactive Intervention and Diversion Team, Road Policing, the Family and Domestic Violence Unit and Criminal Investigations.

ACT Policing Officers-in-Charge of all stations, encourage their members to proactively patrol suburbs within their area of responsibility where possible on their shifts, to establish and strengthen relationships with business owners and the community. All ACT Policing Station Officers in Charge engage with business owners and operators as opportunities arise, to raise awareness about burglaries and other criminal conduct, and when requested, provide education on how to protect and secure businesses from criminality. ACT Policing regularly promotes home and safety tips via its website, social media channels and when speaking to the media on related issues or investigations. The SafeHome Program funded by the ACT Government provides workshops on strategies for improving home security, and is funded to assist homes vulnerable to property crime to implement these strategies.

ACT Policing's leadership team at Belconnen Police Station has been highly vigilant with engagement in West Belconnen. ACT Policing's Officer in Charge of Belconnen Police Station has indicated that officers are keen to continue building relationships with business owners and residents in suburbs such as Hawker, Page and Scullin.

It is important to note that ACT Policing continues to operate on a priority response basis. All reports to police are prioritised in accordance with dispatch protocols meaning those incidents where people are in emergency or life threatening are prioritised higher, with a faster response time in those matters. ACT Policing has a flexible workforce and can rapidly redirect resources to priority matters as required. For example, ACT Policing ensured a visible presence at shopping centres and town precincts in the wake of the Bondi shopping centre incident.

ACT Policing's Intelligence Team analyses a variety of information sources to identify patterns, convergences, and advises on prioritisation to maximise crime

reduction opportunities and increase community safety. Target areas for patrolling are based on intelligence, which draws on a number of sources including community involvement and engagement directly with ACT Policing.

ACT Policing's response time and resourcing are based on all other operational priorities occurring at the time. Additionally, ACT Policing prioritises its responses to life threatening emergencies first, followed by incidents where there is an immediate threat to a person or property. Canberra's condensed geographical nature does, however, mean that officers can move across the territory in a timely manner, with police regularly undertaking duties in different patrol zones as required.

In June 2023, the ACT Government committed to enhance community safety by investing more than \$107 million in recruiting additional 126 ACT Policing personnel over a five-year period. This was the largest single staffing and funding boost ever received by ACT Policing. All areas of ACT Policing saw an increase in numbers.

### Reporting

ACT Policing encourages the community to utilise the various reporting avenues available when requiring police assistance.

The public is encouraged to call 131 444 to report any illegal or anti-social activity as the incident is occurring to allow police the opportunity to direct the best and most appropriate resource to respond.

Another option is to submit a report via Crime Stoppers on 1800 333 000 or via the website on [www.crimestoppersact.com.au](http://www.crimestoppersact.com.au). Reports can be provided anonymously via Crime Stoppers. This avenue is best used to build intelligence on a person/s of interest, or safety concern for a community so police can proactively provide a presence in the area and target the problematic behaviour. CCTV and dash cam footage can also be submitted via this Crime Stoppers.

ACT Policing has implemented online reporting to supplement current reporting methods and have expanded their online portal to include the reporting of theft and lost property since May 2025, alongside property damage, vandalism and dangerous driving.

This expanded capability will now allow incidents such as retail theft (e.g. theft of clothes or alcohol from a retail outlet) and personal theft (e.g. theft of tools from the tray of a vehicle or a bike theft) to be reported to ACT Policing via its website. Lost property such as mobile phones or wallets can now also be reported online.

The portal provides convenience for the community while also allowing ACT Policing to better respond to incidents where immediate police assistance is required.

I trust this information provides the petitioners with assurance that their concerns are understood, have been acknowledged by the ACT Government and efforts are being made by Government and ACT Policing to address these issues.

## **Building and construction—regulation—petition 8-25**

By **Mr Steel**, Minister for Planning and Sustainable Development, dated 3 June 2025,

in response to a petition lodged by Mr Parton on 18 March 2025 concerning the construction approval system.

*The response read as follows:*

Dear Mr Duncan

I refer to your letter of 18 March 2025 regarding Petition no. 008-25 (the petition), tabled by Mr Mark Parton MLA in the ACT Legislative Assembly on 18 March 2025 concerning approvals in the building and construction regulatory system.

An effective building and construction regulatory system is important for the health, safety, and wellbeing of our community. Confidence in the regulatory system is critical to the productivity and economic sustainability of the building and construction industry.

- 1. Have genuine consultation with the ACT building industry to help mitigate the regulatory burden, streamline approval procedures, and restore confidence in the system.*

The ACT Government is committed to working together with the building and construction sector to identify improvements to building and construction processes, to support the delivery of more quality housing and developments in the ACT.

Consultation with industry is a key part of our regulatory reform program and processes. Most recently the ACT Government has undertaken extensive consultation in relation to the development of the new *Planning Act 2023*, and reform initiatives including swimming pool safety, the Property Developer and Regulation Scheme and the Professional Engineers Registration Scheme. Consultation on these reforms included a public consultation process and targeted stakeholder consultation with industry representatives such as the Housing Industry Association (HIA), Property Council (PCA) and Master Builders Association (MBA). Officials from the Environment, Planning and Sustainable Development Directorate (EPSDD) and myself, continue to meet with representatives from the sector outside of these reforms to discuss opportunities for improvement in the building and construction regulatory system.

There are a range of measures underway to help support efficiencies and productivity in the building and construction industry. Earlier this year, I announced that the ACT Government will be working with the construction sector on a new construction productivity agenda. This work aims to create a more efficient and effective planning and building system by looking at issues holistically. Industry's input to this process is vital to ensure the success of this work.

A key outcome is to develop a range of agreed practical measures to support our goal of enabling 30,000 new homes by 2030. The first meeting to begin to work with industry to consider reform proposals occurred on 15 April 2025 through the existing Planning and Construction Industry Chief Executive Reference Group (PACICERG). Representatives from EvoEnergy and Icon Water participated in these discussions.

As an outcome of this meeting, Reform Proposal Requests have been distributed to PACICERG members and representatives of the broader planning and construction

sector as an opportunity for them to identify specific issues and provide suggested areas of reform to be considered by Government which may improve the approval pathway. I look forward to receiving industry's specific reform suggestions and progressing the outcomes of this work.

The ACT Government, in work being led by Minister Cheyne, also hosts a construction industry round table every six months where peak bodies and representatives have the opportunity to provide feedback on applications and regulatory processes related to the city and government services portfolio. At the roundtable on 25 March 2025 feedback was sought on the impact of the *Urban Forest Act 2023* and the *Public Unleased Land Act 2013*, which will inform the legislative reviews underway. Officials from the Environment, Planning and Sustainable Development Directorate (EPSDD) are working closely with colleagues in the Transport Canberra and City Services Directorate (TCCS) to identify opportunities to streamline processes, reduce regulatory burden and provide greater certainty to industry on the development outcomes which can be achieved. The next roundtable is anticipated to occur in September 2025.

The machinery of government changes happening this year will also support the streamlining of processes to effectively manage development approvals. The establishment of a new City and Environment Directorate will lead to better alignment of processes and service provision to industry groups. This includes a recommendation for the formation of a new Development Solutions branch which should be a front door for engagement with government on building and development matters and will manage a streamlined and coordinated process of entity referrals.

*2. Commit to no more changes to the National Construction Code, as its applied in the ACT for the next 5 years.*

The ACT Government intends to implement the National Construction Code (NCC) updates in-line with the current cycle. We will only consider implementing changes that benefit Canberrans. Pausing updates for the next five years to the buildings where people live, work and engage socially is not in the best interest of our community.

The Productivity Commission released a research report titled 'Housing construction productivity: Can we fix it' in February this year. It affirms that the NCC is sound in-principle. The goal of the NCC is to enable the achievement of nationally consistent, minimum necessary requirements for safety and health, amenity and accessibility, and sustainability in the design, construction, performance and liveability of new buildings.

In 2016, the NCC cycle changed from annual updates to updates every three years, with the focus alternating between residential and commercial buildings. Changes to the NCC are subject to regulatory impact statements and undergo an extensive public consultation process. Further to this, the ACT undertakes targeted industry consultation on the updates to support implementation.

NCC 2022 contained some of the most significant changes since its inception, with a focus on increasing energy efficiency and liveable housing requirements for residential buildings. Home energy efficiency had not been increased since NCC 2010, and Canberrans are now benefitting from having more accessible and comfortable homes that have lower energy bills. NCC 2025 is focused on commercial buildings and will be introduced in the ACT at a date to be agreed by

Australia's building ministers, achieving, as far as possible, national consistency. The ACT Government will ensure that there is sufficient industry lead-in time and education materials to prepare for any upcoming changes.

The ACT Government is considering the Productivity Commissioner's Report and its recommendations to support the development of the construction productivity agenda for the ACT. Working closely with industry, this work will identify specific, targeted and agreed reforms to inform future regulatory change with the aim of supporting supply and affordability of housing.

*3. Allow licensed builders to certify pool fencing.*

The ACT Government is committed to avoiding deaths and serious injuries from drowning incidents in home swimming pools and spas in the ACT. The new swimming pool safety reforms require home swimming pools and spas in the ACT to have a safety barrier, such as a fence, which meets current standards from 1 May 2028.

To show compliance with the new rules, a compliance certificate needs to be obtained from an authorised person. An individual can apply to be an authorised person. The applicant must have the experience and skills to undertake the functions of the role and be a suitable person to undertake the functions of the role. Further information about this process and a list of current authorised persons is on the ACT Government's Planning Website.

In addition, licensed building surveyors (certifiers) in the ACT are automatically deemed an authorised person as they currently certify that swimming pools or spas are built to the prescribed safety standards. A list of licensed certifiers can be found on the Access Canberra public register.

A licensed builder may choose to apply to be an authorised person, and they would be assessed against the experience, skills and suitability requirements. It is important to note that self-certification would not be allowable. It would be inappropriate to allow individuals responsible for the construction to certify their own work. This would raise a range of ethical and conflict of interest concerns.

The ACT Government does not intend to automatically deem a licensed builder as an authorised person, as they do not currently certify swimming pools or spas. The ACT Government is not aware of concerns with delays in this space, but welcomes any evidence the sector has to help inform the approach to implementing these reforms. If there is a shortage of authorised persons available for certification, the government may consider expanding the scope of practitioners qualified to certify barriers, where they were not involved in the construction of those barriers.

I will be looking into this issue in more detail as part of the productivity construction agenda and work in response to the Assembly Resolution of 18 March 2025—Regulatory Burden in the Construction Industry. EPSDD is undertaking a review of the documentation of the new pool fencing standards to improve understanding of the new regulatory framework. The review will also look at the use of authorised persons and certifiers. I will table a ministerial statement on this review by the end of this year.

*4. Require referral entities for building and development approvals to provide timely advice on applications.*

This year I have heard that several elements of the planning and building systems are delaying construction works which is placing strain on the industry. I acknowledge overall timeframe for building and construction approvals needs to be carefully considered to identify specific reform opportunities to improve efficiency and timeliness. This is particularly important at a time of significant planning reform, and government commitments to deliver more housing and other significant development projects.

Under the *Planning Act 2023*, the Territory Planning Authority (the Authority) must refer a development application (DA) to mandatory entities. These mandatory entities differ depending on the nature and complexity of the proposal. The Authority will consider the advice and determine whether sufficient evidence has been provided with the application or whether further information is required. It is at the discretion of the Authority whether any matters raised can be addressed or conditioned as part of the statutory decision-making process. The Authority endeavours to progress an application where appropriate.

As part of the Assembly Resolution of 18 March 2025—Regulatory Burden in the Construction Industry, the ACT Government is undertaking an internal review of referral entities to address delays in providing decisions on building approvals and DAs. I will report back to the Assembly on this review by the end of the calendar year. As mentioned earlier, I have also invited referral entities to be a part of the productivity construction agenda work so that we can work together with industry to improve our systems.

As noted above, the formation of a new City and Environment Directorate with a new Development Solutions branch will allow for improved service provision to industry on building and development matters and will manage a streamlined and coordinated process of entity referrals.

*5. Automatically approve building and development applications that are not decided within statutory timeframes.*

Building approvals are issued by licensed building certifiers under the *Building Act 2004*. There are no statutory timeframes for the building certifier to issue a building approval upon application from the owner, and the certifier must not issue a building approval if the application is in contravention of the *Building Act 2004*. The ACT Government is not aware of concerns with delays in the issuing of building approvals by building certifiers. The ACT Government understands that the private certification industry currently has capacity to certify buildings in a timely manner.

Within the DA process, there are mechanisms for the timing of a decision. Section 193 of the *Planning Act 2023* outlines that if a DA is not decided within time, then the decision-maker is taken to have decided to refuse the application. This provision provides an option for the applicant to appeal the deemed refusal through the ACT Civil and Administrative Tribunal (ACAT). However, if an appeal is not made, the decision maker is still able to approve or conditionally approve the application. That said, the Authority endeavours to make a decision within these timeframes and has a target of deciding 75% of all DAs within the set period.

Most DAs that fall outside the timeframes are complex and usually include several issues that take time to resolve. Having these automatically approved if not decided within the statutory timeframe would not result in good planning and development outcomes for the Canberra community. It is more appropriate for the Authority to



consider each issue and determine how to progress the application. I welcome an open dialogue with industry to see what we can do collectively to improve the DA process.

The ACT Government is undertaking an internal review of the assessment of DAs, as part of the Assembly Resolution of 18 March 2025 – Regulatory Burden in the Construction Industry. This review will also look at exemption declarations and staffing requirements in the DA processing team to identify additional streamlining changes to meet its performance targets on the processing of development applications and exemption declarations. I will report back to the Assembly on this matter by the end of the calendar year.

I look forward to working with the industry to ensure that our systems and the entities that are involved in them are delivering efficient outcomes that support the productivity of the construction sector. It is equally important to ensure that, in the process of improving regulation, safety and quality are not compromised.

I trust this information is of assistance and provides advice on issues raised in the petition.

### **Macquarie—swimming pool—petitions 49-24 and 10-25**

By **Mr Steel**, Minister for Planning and Sustainable Development, dated 3 June 2025, in response to a petition lodged by Ms Clay on 4 March 2025 concerning Big Splash, Macquarie.

*The response read as follows:*

Dear Mr Duncan

Thank you for your letter about the petition No. E-PET-049-24 and PET-010-25, lodged by Ms Jo Clay MLA, about the ongoing operation of Big Splash water park and zoning of Block 1 Section 53 Macquarie.

The Government notes the matters raised in the petitions in relation to the current operation of the site. It is noted that the petition is also requesting ACT Government to provide a guarantee regarding the future use of the site. The following provides information addressing each of the matters raised in the petitions.

*Investigate all possible avenues to keep this important community facility open for use this summer and for future generations of Canberrans, including buying the facility and operating it as a public pool*

It is noted that the use of land for this site is administered through a Crown lease.

In 2006, the current Crown lease was granted under the Land (Planning and Environment) Act 1991 and expires on 2 May 2105. The block is privately leased and the purpose clause in the lease currently allows for the purpose of an aquatic and indoor sports and recreation centre and an unlicensed family restaurant.

I have been advised the Territory Planning Authority (the Authority) is of the view that the Crown lease does not contain a clause that specifically requires the ongoing operation of the facility. However, under Schedule 4 (10) of the Planning

Act 2023, failing to use land for a continuous period of at least 1 year for the purpose for which the lease over the land is granted constitutes an offence.

In December 2024, Yvette Berry MLA wrote to the Big Splash Water Park Management Team and correspondence was received in reply stating that the facility was closed to undertake significant rectification and maintenance works. The works identified included fixing cracks in the pools, repainting and tiling of the pool, as needed, repairing the old slide (pumps, filtration systems, structural steel and main control systems), renovating the change rooms, the kitchen and cafe area as well as improving the landscaping with more seating and table areas. It was also indicated that the proponent was also considering proposing other recreational facilities to upgrade the functionality of the park so that it is available to the community throughout the year.

It is up to the lessee what they would like to pursue on their site. This may include carrying out maintenance or proposing future developments in accordance with the legislative processes. They also may choose to sell the lease. Closure for on-site maintenance and pursuing additional facilities is also a matter for the lessee.

Notwithstanding the above, the Crown lease for the site requires the lessee to maintain, repair and keep in repair the premises to the satisfaction of the Authority, and permits the Authority to enter the premises and undertake necessary repairs and recover costs from the lessee.

The Compliance Team in Access Canberra conducted inspections in October 2024, and March and April 2025, and undertook urgent repairs to the perimeter fencing earlier this year to address immediate safety and security risks, which the lessee has been notified of. Since then, Access Canberra have been in contact with the lessee to advise them of the safety risks to the public and reminded them of their obligations to maintain and repair the fencing as a matter of priority.

The Government is not in a position to mandate or apply a timeframe on the lessee to finalise maintenance and open the site. The operation and future use of the site, including any additional facilities or uses, is a commercial decision for the lessee of the site.

I have directed both the Environment, Planning and Sustainable Development Directorate (EPSDD) and Access Canberra to provide me with advice on further regulatory options available for the site, including consideration of risk and harm to the community.

*Guarantee that the zoning of the land as Parks and Recreation PRZ2 Restricted Access Recreation is retained to ensure this valuable community facility remains a community facility.*

The ACT Government has no plans to change the PRZ2 zoning of this site in the Territory Plan.

The Territory Plan is the primary statutory planning document that guides planning and development in the ACT. It outlines what development can take place and where. A way in which the Territory Plan achieves this is by designating land use zones.

Currently, the Big Splash site is zoned Parks and Recreation PRZ2 Restricted Access Recreation. The zone ultimately sets the outcomes and requirements that

need to be met for any development proposals on the site. Specifically, the Territory Plan identifies a number of assessable uses for this zone under the Land Use Table in the E05 – Parks and Recreation Zones Policy. These assessable uses include uses such as carpark, club, community facility, community activity centre, guest house, hotel, indoor recreation facility, motel, outdoor recreation facility and public agency. Given the block is privately leased, the lessee could apply to add any additional assessable uses to the Crown lease, if the use is consistent with the existing zoning policy. A development application (DA) would be required for a lease variation to add any additional uses to a Crown lease.

A DA is assessed, independently, by the Authority against the requirements of the Territory Plan and Planning Act 2023. In particular, any future development proposals would need to be assessed against specific policy outcomes for the PRZ2 zone, which includes accommodating facilities that meet the recreational needs and demands of the community, and provide for a range of sport and recreation facilities and users, whether in public or private ownership.

Should any changes be proposed to the zoning on the Big Splash site, it would require a major plan amendment (MPA). A major plan amendment is a detailed statutory process which includes all of the following:

- consideration by the Territory Planning Authority, who will consider the ACT Planning Strategy and Belconnen District Strategy.
- a minimum of 30 working days of public consultation.
- entity consultation.
- consideration by the relevant Legislative Assembly committee, which may involve an Inquiry.
- decision by the Minister for Planning and Sustainable Development (the Minister).
- if approved by the Minister, presentation and tabling in the Legislative Assembly who may move to reject the rezoning.

More information on the major plan amendment process is available on the ACT Planning website.

The ACT Government is not planning to initiate changes to the Territory Plan to change the zoning for this site. Nor are there any current proposals before the independent Territory Planning Authority from the landowner to amend the Territory Plan for this site. The ACT Government cannot guarantee that zone changes for the site will not be pursued by the lessee in the future.

It should be noted that the current leasing and planning system encourages an efficient and continual use of a site. The ACT Government will guide lessees through any required government processes and assist, where appropriate.

### **Burrangiri Aged Care Respite Centre—petition 5-25**

By **Ms Stephen-Smith**, Minister for Health, dated 20 June 2025, in response to a petition lodged by Ms Carrick on 8 April 2025 concerning Burrangiri Aged Care Respite Centre.

*The response read as follows:*

Dear Mr Duncan

I welcome the opportunity to respond to Petition 017-25 and E-Petition 005-25 regarding the previously planned closure of Burrangiri Aged Care Respite Facility in Rivett.

I recognise the concerns raised by the community in these petitions and representations made to Members of the Legislative Assembly regarding the future availability of respite and other community-based services in the ACT.

I also recognise the Assembly's significant interest in this matter and draw your attention to Assembly resolutions on 5 March and 8 May 2025 as well as a resolution on 10 April 2025 under Standing Order 213A to produce documents.

I addressed these resolutions in the Assembly on 14 May 2025 in which I announced that on hearing the concerns of the community on the availability of respite in the ACT, and following the receipt of advice from the Government Solicitor's Office, the ACT Health Directorate (ACTHD) would consider a single select tender process for The Salvation Army (TSA) to deliver aged care respite services at Burrangiri for a further two years.

I can now further advise that the tender process is underway, following ACT Government procurement rules. The continuation of services at Burrangiri for a further two years will allow the ACT Government to work with the Commonwealth on more sustainable solutions for respite in the ACT without decreasing the availability of respite beds.

The decision to close the Burrangiri facility followed carefully considered advice from ACTHD that the 35-year-old facility would need significant refurbishment to extend its useful life and bring it up to modern standards. ACTHD has advised that continued use of Burrangiri as a respite care facility into the longer term would require a significant scope of work. To undertake these works the facility will need to be vacated and this remains the case.

The Commonwealth Government has made a \$10 million commitment to deliver purpose-built respite care in the ACT in either an existing or new facility. This significant commitment has changed what options are available on the future of respite services in the ACT, including Burrangiri.

Aged care respite remains a Commonwealth responsibility and national aged care reforms are seeing significant new investment in the ACT which will result in more residential aged care beds opening by the end of 2025. The ACT Government will continue to call on the Commonwealth to work with the aged care sector to facilitate additional capacity for respite in existing and new residential aged care in the short, medium and long term.

The ACT Government acknowledges the work of TSA and the Burrangiri staff and thanks them for their work to deliver quality respite care. We are grateful for TSA's assistance in reaching a positive outcome for the community and look forward to working with the Commonwealth to continue to offer respite to the Canberra community.

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

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

That the petitions and responses so lodged be noted.

**Off-leash dog areas—Point Hut Dog Exercise Area—petition 27-25**

**MS MORRIS** (Brindabella) (10.06): I am proud to present this community backed petition, which calls for reversal of the Labor government's decision to close the Point Hut dog exercise area to dogs off leash. The Point Hut dog exercise area is considered one of Canberra's best kept secrets. It is enjoyed daily by locals to exercise their dogs off leash. It boasts a vast, open expanse for dogs of all sizes to get fresh air and exercise against a glorious backdrop of nature.

When Minister for City Services Tara Cheyne's office contacted my office and Lanyon locals in May, to advise that the Point Hut dog exercise area would be prohibited to dogs off leash when the new Lanyon Dog Park opened, locals geared up to fight for the future of their beloved dog park. Within hours, a petition was drafted and soon shared with the broader community. This petition, which attracted 1,172 signatures in little more than two weeks, represents the voices of the Lanyon community who do not want to see their slice of paradise taken away from them.

I want to thank the principal petitioner, Mr James Sizer, for his tireless and passionate work fighting for the future of the Point Hut dog exercise area. James is a Lanyon local who, like many other dog owners, has used the beloved dog park for decades to exercise his gorgeous little dogs.

No-one can tell you exactly when the dog park was established. But locals that I have spoken to have told me they had been using the area for at least three decades. And over the years, locals like James have personally invested their own time and money into maintaining the park to ensure that the entire community, and their beloved pets, can enjoy the space.

Largely under James's leadership, the community has installed water tanks and benches, and has organised lawn-mowing events to maintain the grounds. The Lanyon community has worked together so that everyone can use the space. And that is why so many locals will tell you this is not just a valued parcel of land to exercise dogs, but it is a space that brings people together, where people have built their community and built meaningful relationships there. This is exactly the sort of community asset that the government should be seeking to build more of, not dismantling with senseless bureaucracy and restrictions.

This petition was never designed to oppose the new Lanyon dog park, which is being built directly adjacent to the Point Hut one. The two parks can healthily co-exist. What the petition clearly opposed was a senseless decision to prohibit dogs off leash. The groundswell of grassroot support for this petition represented a force that could not be reckoned with. And that is why I am absolutely confident that it was the deafening voice of thousands of united Lanyon locals that saw the ACT government reverse their decision to close the dog park. So I thank, once again, Mr Sizer, for his tremendous efforts—because I can just as confidently say that this outcome would not have been possible without James leading the charge.

The government will tell us that it was simply a misunderstanding all along, and they will try to separate the decision of the Conservator from themselves. But locals know that is not true. They know it is not true because since last year they have been asking the government what would happen to their beloved dog park when the new one opened. They could see the writing on the wall, but, when they asked, they got no meaningful response.

Soon after the election, they contacted their local members, which is when I became aware of the situation. Like them, I got no meaningful response from the government when I made representations to the minister. In February, I again sought answers from the government in annual reports hearings, and the government confirmed that the Environment, Planning and Sustainable Development Directorate were investigating the future of the dog park, and, whilst still in limbo on what that meant, I made further representations seeking answers.

There could be no doubt in the government's mind of the community's sentiment and a strong desire for this park to be allowed to continue operating; despite that, the government overlooked months of representations from members. There was no consultation, no genuine dialogue with people who have used that park for decades, and no attempt to visit the park to see what was so special about it; just a senseless bureaucratic decision to overreach into the lives of people they know nothing about. The government did not predict how ferocious the community backlash would be, and while ultimately common sense prevailed, many will remember the lack of consultation and lack of transparency.

This petition has already achieved its objective to protect one of Canberra's best kept secrets; the government has just this Saturday confirmed that it will. The government confirmed it at exactly the same time the community was gathering for a local barbeque in honour of the Point Hut dog exercise area. So, with our mission achieved, let this petition instead serve as a warning to the government should it attempt to close the area. *(Time expired.)*

**MS MORRIS:** I seek leave to continue my remarks.

Leave not granted.

**Trees—tree-removal guidelines—petition 11-25**  
**Off-leash dog areas—Point Hut Dog Exercise Area—petition 27-25**

**MR PARTON** (Brindabella) (10.12): In my time as a candidate, and then as an elected member of this place, I have knocked on close to 20,000 doors in Tuggeranong, so I have had thousands of conversations with constituents and, Mr Deputy Speaker, can I tell you, that the single issue that I have written the most ministerial representations on is dangerous and damaging trees. Thousands of Canberrans are fed up to the back teeth with the fact that this government will not allow them to sensibly deal with trees that are a genuine danger to their properties or their lives, or that are causing actual damage to their properties.

Based on the feedback from government that comes back to me and to these

constituents, it is very easy to arrive at the conclusion that this government gives much more weight to the health of the trees than it does to the danger that the trees cause, and that if and when the government needs to build a tram line, for argument's sake, it is okay to remove hundreds and hundreds of trees, but when it comes to basic safety in the suburbs, people run a distant second.

So this petition calls for some common sense in this space, and I would hope that the 350-odd voices on this petition will, through this process, have their voices heard when it comes to the in-motion review of the Urban Forest Management Plan, so that, as a city, we can adopt a much more sensible position, and I optimistically believe that that will be the case.

The Charles Conder Primary petition is a fairly straightforward petition that calls on the government—to quote Mr Steel—“to get on with the job” of delivering basic infrastructure upgrades. As the petition states, enrolment numbers at Charles Conder Primary have almost doubled in the last decade, yet the basic infrastructure needs of the school community have consistently failed to be met. The limited parking at the school forces parents to park in unsafe locations when they are dropping off and picking up kids from school. There are even a number of informal parking areas off Tom Roberts Avenue and Abrahams Crescent necessitated by the lack of formal parking infrastructure. These informal parking areas have been around for so long, and these areas have experienced such significant land erosion, that it is visible on Google Maps. I know the minister will now check that out because she is a bit of a map nerd.

The oval at Charles Conder is also used by the Tuggeranong Knights Rugby Club and other local sports teams. It is one of only a few in the ACT that does not have any form of dedicated parking, and that means that those using Conder 101 and 102 are forced to park in dangerous areas, presenting a very real risk to local residents and sports goers alike. I am hopeful that this petition gives the government the push to finally provide proper infrastructure investment.

With respect to the dog exercise area in Gordon, there were a lot of signatures. Like, wow; that's crazy! If my kelpies were able to sign—they are under 18, so I do not think that they count!—they would have been keen to sign the petition because they just love it. Again, I echo the words of Ms Morris. I reckon if I had been finishing Ms Morris's speech, I would have said that this petition has already achieved its objective to protect one of Canberra's best kept secrets—it is amazing the number of people who flock down there now because of all the attention—and that, with our mission achieved, let this petition instead serve as a warning to the government that, should it attempt to close the area to dogs off-leash when the hype has died down and when the cameras are looking the other way, the government will have the community to contend with. More than 1,100 signatures was just the beginning of what could have been in the fight to save the Point Hut dog exercise area. This petition is important for dogs and for our community, and Ms Morris and I thank everyone who signed it, because that is what community is all about. Thank you.

#### **Motor vehicles—left-hand drive vehicles—petition 48-24**

**MR CAIN** (Ginninderra) (10.16): I rise to speak and lodge and table some paper petitions for the support of the registration of left-hand drive vehicles of any age in the

ACT. I note that the petition has closed. It came up with a total number of 195 supporting signatures in the e-petition format and 23 in the paper format. I want to acknowledge Mr Peter Bakos—who is in the gallery here and waving at us—who was the principal petitioner for this petition. I am very grateful for Peter's enthusiasm for a more flexible approach to registration of left-hand drive vehicles in the ACT.

I am delighted, in the time allowed me, to read, in Peter's own words, why he thinks this petition is worthy of government's support and a favourable response. Mr Bakos said:

It is time for the ACT to modernise its vehicle import and registration laws by allowing left-hand drive cars of any age to be legally registered and driven without unnecessary restrictions. The current limitations on left-hand drive vehicles are outdated, economically counterproductive and contrary to the principles of personal freedom, automotive heritage preservation and sustainable transport policy. First and foremost, the argument that left-hand drive vehicles are inherently unsafe on Australian roads is both overstated and largely unsupported by contemporary evidence.

Countries such as the USA, Germany and Canada, all with high road safety standards, permit both left-hand drive and right-hand drive vehicles on their roads with no catastrophic consequences. Australia is not uniquely incapable of managing this reality. Modern drivers are more adaptive, GPS systems improve navigation and left-hand drive vehicles are perfectly manageable on right-hand drive roads when driven with due care, which is already a requirement for any driver, regardless of vehicle configuration.

Secondly, restricting left-hand drive vehicles by age is an arbitrary and unjustified barrier to automotive enthusiasts, collectors and new arrivals who may own rare or valuable vehicles from overseas. These restrictions stifle cultural diversity and personal freedom. The ACT, as the seat of Australia's national government and a progressive jurisdiction, should be leading the way in embracing global openness, not stifling it with parochial bureaucratic red tape.

A blanket age-based restriction does not reflect a mechanical condition or safety of a car. Many well-maintained newer left-hand drive vehicles are safer than old, poorly maintained right-hand drive ones, and it makes no sense to continue denying their registration on arbitrary grounds.

Third, allowing left-hand drive vehicles of any age would benefit the ACT economy. Classic car imports, restoration services, specialty automotive parts suppliers and tourism linked to car culture would all experience growth. Enthusiasts currently face high compliance costs or take their vehicles interstate, diverting money that could be kept in the local economy. With simple policy reform the ACT could become a hub for automotive heritage and innovation, attracting interest and investment from collectors across the country and abroad.

Lastly, with the growing global shift to electronic vehicles, many of the most advanced and desirable models, including some made by Lucid, Tesla and Rivian, are produced only in left-hand drive. Australia risks falling behind if it does not make allowances for such vehicles. Embracing left-hand-drive imports of all ages would allow forward-thinking Australians to access the best technology on the global market, accelerating the uptake of cleaner, smarter transport and, in conclusion, there is no rational basis for the ACT to continue restricting left-hand



drive vehicles based on age.

The current policy is a relic of the past, out of sync with technological realities, economic opportunity and personal rights. Reform is not only sensible; it is overdue. Let us end the hypocrisy, embrace practicality and allow left-hand drive cars of any age to take their rightful place on Canberra's roads.

I end by thanking Mr Bakos for his words. The way he has written this, anyone in this office would be pleased to have him as a speechwriter. So thank you, Mr Bakos.

I seek leave to table an out-of-order petition:

Leave granted.

**MR CAIN:** I table:

Petition which does not conform with the standing orders—Vehicle registration reform—Inclusion of left-hand drive vehicles registration—Proposed inquiry into improving the liveability of (23 signatures).

### **Roads—Woodberry Avenue, Coombs—parking—petition 30-25**

**DR PATERSON** (Murrumbidgee—Minister for Police, Fire and Emergency Services, Minister for Women, Minister for the Prevention of Family and Domestic Violence, Minister for Corrections and Minister for Gaming Reform) (10.22): I rise today to speak to the petition about parking congestion along Woodberry Avenue in Coombs, which was signed by 59 residents calling for action to address parking congestion and safety concerns on Woodberry Avenue.

This petition draws attention to a specific section of Woodberry Avenue, near 2 Woodberry Avenue and Pearlman Street. A large apartment complex with over 140 dwellings sits opposite a row of townhouses, yet this development includes just two designated visitor car parks and no inset parking bays, in contrast to the lower-density end of the street where single, detached homes are located, which features inset parking and more generous space allowances. This disparity in design has led to a build-up of congestion, with residents and visitors regularly parking on the narrow road shoulders and wide grass verges. It is impacting on the visibility for drivers and on safe pedestrian access.

The residents in the area are offering a sensible and constructive solution. This includes investigating the relocation of small verge trees to allow for inset parking bays, and reviewing the function of a central traffic island that may not be serving its intended purpose. These proposals reflect the lived experience of the community and their desire to see a better balance between the housing density and the road infrastructure. The petitioners have asked the Assembly to review the parking arrangements along Woodberry Avenue and Pearlman Street, particularly in areas already experiencing medium- to high-density residential development, and to investigate and implement appropriate inset parking solutions to alleviate congestion and improve safety.

I want to acknowledge the government's commitment to building sustainable, connected communities across Canberra, and I recognise the complexity of planning in

new and evolving suburbs. I thank the residents who have organised and signed this petition, for their constructive advocacy. I look forward to working with the minister to receive a formal response to this. I commend the petition to the Assembly.

**Macquarie—swimming pool—petitions 49-24 and 10-25**

**Hawker, Page and Scullin—police presence—petitions 46-24 and 16-25**

**MS CLAY** (Ginninderra) (10.24): I want to speak about a couple of the petition responses that have been tabled. I was very pleased to see the planning minister's response to the Big Splash petition and I was really glad that parliament backed my motion recently to save Big Splash. The community has been quite worried about this site since it was not open last summer. I think there was a lot of concern and anxiety, particularly when we saw what happened at Phillip pool and in other sites. My colleague Miss Nuttall will be bringing up a matter later on this afternoon about shop squatting, and I think people are keen to see action taken to see things resolved sooner rather than later.

The responses confirmed what we have put into that motion and that piece of policy work—that the failure to use land for a continuous period of at least one year for the purpose for which the lease was granted is an offence. That means people cannot take a commercial lease like that and simply stay there and occupy that land. The government can take enforcement action in such situations. It is good to have that confirmed. We have seen on the ground quite a lot of action. We have good fencing now. There are some works to clean up. I am in good contact with the minister to check that the operators are cooperating and participating in that, and are bearing the costs of that, and we are very much looking forward to seeing what will happen with that site.

The community is really, really keen to see that site opened up as a pool and continue as a recreational facility. We are pleased to see—confirmed by the parliamentary agreement, but also confirmed in this petition response—that the government will not be rezoning the land. That will remain as park and recreation land. So that has been a good outcome, and we are just hoping that we see that continue, and that, in the next six to eight months, we know what is going on there.

I was also pleased to see the response to the petition about crime in Hawker, Page and Scullin. These sorts of issues are things that all of us talk with our constituents about all the time. When a constituent has a problem, that problem matters, and we engage with it. I always meet with them and liaise with the right area of government to make sure that the problem is addressed.

There are lots of different ways we can deal with things. We can form neighbourhood watches, we can get ACT Policing involved, we can look at community situations, and we can look at the social causes of what is happening when we see behaviours that we do not like. It was good to see that crime in Hawker and Page is trending downwards. It is decreasing. That is little comfort to anybody who has actually experienced crime or socially destructive behaviour, but it does tell us that there is not a systemic problem.

But Scullin has had a small increase in crime. I am pleased to say that during this term we have had much better responses from our minister for policing. We had a little bit of trouble getting information from Labor's police minister last term, but we have had

really good information and responses to our constituent concerns this term, so I am hoping that we can deal with those matters well, and in a way that reassures people quite quickly this term.

### **Trees—tree-removal guidelines—petition 11-25**

**MR BRADDOCK** (Yerrabi) (10.28): I wish to speak very briefly to the petition sponsored by you, Mr Speaker, regarding the tree removal guidelines. There is a reasonable emotional reaction in this petition that is worth acknowledging. However, I wonder whether the problem is in the system itself as characterised in the petition, or how the matter is resourced. I say this because, based on conversations I have been able to have, including with the former Greens environment minister Rebecca Vassarotti, it is evident to me that there is a capability gap in the tree protection unit. We witness a lack of compliance and enforcement action, which means that when residents take actions into their own hands there is no regulatory response on behalf of the government. The unit's resourcing also seems to focus on planting trees to meet our canopy targets, which I welcome, but there is far less being done that is helpful or necessary to maintain the public trees that we already have.

A lack of maintenance work allows for deteriorating trees, which can appear to become dangerous trees—and sometimes they do. Therefore, we get an uplift in reports on dangerous trees here in the ACT and the tree protection unit struggles to respond to them all. Then we get an elevated anxiety in the community on this issue. Over the last two sittings I have been asking the relevant minister for information on dangerous tree requests, and I am sorry to say that I have been getting a lot of non-answers containing a great deal of junk data. It looks as if City Services is struggling to isolate the information relating to dangerous trees from their data on tree maintenance requests. And as they say: you cannot manage what you do not measure.

It is budget week, and I want—and I hope others agree—to see budget measure that will help us meet and maintain our targets for a 30 per cent urban canopy cover. Accordingly, I am hoping to see something in the budget for the tree protection unit. If there is not, the minister is probably going to struggle to respond to this petition in a useful way, and I am going to have to keep asking questions about how we maintain a healthy urban forest.

### **Off-leash dog areas—Point Hut Dog Exercise Area—petition 27-25**

**MS TOUGH** (Brindabella) (10.29): I rise to speak on the Point Hut Dog Exercise Area petition lodged by Ms Morris. I want to congratulate the community of the Lanyon Valley on the recent victory to save the dog park.

For those who may not be familiar, the Point Hut Dog Exercise Area is a beloved Lanyon Valley dog park which has catered for the community for over 25 years, probably 30 years—no one is really sure, but it has pretty much always been there. It offers a safe and welcoming environment for dogs of all breeds and sizes to run, play and socialise, and for their owners, as well, to have a space where their dogs can run. It is about 10 hectares in size. It is a beautiful space.

In November last year, I heard from members of the community who were concerned

about the future of the Point Hut Dog Exercise Area once the new Lanyon Dog Park opens later this year, adjacent to the existing one. I received advice that Parks and Conservation, and the government, had no intention to restrict dogs off-leash at Point Hut upon the opening of the new dog park, and when you looked at the consultation material around the new dog park, it talked about how people wanted to see the two work together, and that was part of the plan for the two separate areas.

But in April, concerns were raised when there was advice received about consideration being given to changing the whole block so that dogs off-lead would no longer be permitted in the area once the new dog park opened. And I must say, with impressive haste, the community sprang into action. Within hours, I was inundated with users of the Point Hut Dog Exercise Area expressing their disappointment in the change and wanting to make sure their dog park was saved. That Monday, only a few days later, I was down at the dog park meeting the dog owners, listening to their concerns and talking about possible solutions and a way forward. The next day I wrote to Minister Cheyne to clarify and asked what the existing plans were. I advocated on behalf of the community so that we would not see changes to the Point Hut Dog Exercise Area.

At the same time, Ms Morris launched her petition, which gained over 1,000 signatures, which is no small feat for an Assembly petition. I think we can all agree that that is a pretty amazing response. I would like to note that at one point the two petitions with the largest number of signatures were actually from the Lanyon Valley, which shows that the community of Lanyon is active and has a say, and as a resident of Lanyon, I am pretty proud of Lanyon Valley. And I want to thank Mr Speaker for talking on that other one today, although it does not close until today, so we will be bringing it tomorrow.

As it happens though—back to the dog park—it was not the ACT government's intention to replace one dog park with the other. The Conservator of Flora and Fauna took the opportunity of the new one opening to explore options for the broader site and making some of the areas on-lead without fully appreciating the community's love for the dog park and the purpose of the dog park. When it became apparent that the change had unintentionally launched widespread panic about what was happening, officials from Parks and Conservation, and from Ministers Cheyne's office, met with members of the community at the dog park to hear concerns and understand the situation fully.

So, on Saturday morning, it was wonderful to see confirmation from Minister Cheyne that the Conservator of Flora and Fauna had accepted advice from Parks and Conservation for the dog park to remain off-leash, combined with clear confirmation of the areas surrounding the dog park that are dog on-leash and dog prohibited for environmental reasons.

Speaking with regular users of the dog park on Saturday, it was remarked to me how this has changed the community at the Point Hut Dog Exercise Area. While it was once an area where people did not really interact much with each other, but obviously their dogs did, it is now a place where everyone chats; everyone says hello when they are at the park and even now in the supermarket. It has really brought the community together.

I want to thank the primary petitioner, James Sizer, for his work in bringing the community together. He remarked to me on Saturday how, now, when he is in Woolies at Lanyon, people stop and say hello and talk to him. He thinks this is a really wonderful

outcome for the community, bringing everyone together.

Thank you, Ms Morris, for bringing the petition, but I also want to thank Minister Cheyne, and the Conservator, for listening to the people of Lanyon Valley voice their grievances and for proactively responding to the feedback. It is a wonderful win for members of the Lanyon Valley community and the broader Tuggeranong area.

This small yet impactful victory for the community reflects the influence that longstanding connections to community and spaces can have. I am energised by this win and hope to see the continued advancements of Tuggeranong causes, and Lanyon Valley particularly, enabled by the new budget today. There is so much work to do for our local facilities and community spaces, but this accomplishment proves that it can be done.

### **Trees—tree-removal guidelines—petition 11-25**

**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) (10.35): In the minute that we have left, I want to respond to Mr Braddock's comments.

I do not understand what he is talking about regarding “can’t get answers from me”. And if he would like to write to me and tell me what he is talking about, I would appreciate that. It is also not the first time that Mr Braddock has attacked the public service over something that his ensuing remarks show he really does not understand—how it works, and that tree maintenance versus the tree protection unit, and people who are deciding applications, are in different teams.

I would note that the urban forest applications need to be decided within 35 working days of receipt, and the average processing time of the 2,165 compliant applications received is 31 days. I would ask him to reflect on his comments, which are unfair and belittling of the public service. And, in fact, as you would know, Mr Speaker, your petition does much of what we look to do with the disallowable instrument that the Greens sought to strike out in the last sitting.

**Mr Braddock:** I have a point of order. I have been misrepresented in the minister's comments.

**MR SPEAKER:** The time for the debate has expired. Mr Braddock, you are seeking to make a point of order on a debate that has expired?

**Mr Braddock:** Yes, Mr Speaker. I have been misrepresented in the minister's comments, and I just wish to respond to that.

**MR SPEAKER:** Okay, Mr Braddock.

**Mr Braddock:** Mr Speaker, at no point did I attack the ACT public service. I applaud the work done by the trees unit within the ACT. I was making a point in terms of the level of resourcing available for those areas and that it was not allowing the achievement of the government's objectives.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

## **China Trade Mission**

### **Ministerial statement**

**MR BARR** (Kurrajong—Chief Minister, Minister for Economic Development and Minister for Tourism and Trade) (10.37): Mr Speaker, the government recently undertook a trade mission to China to mark the 25th anniversary of Canberra's sister city agreement with Beijing.

The mission was coordinated by the Office of International Engagement and VisitCanberra. Canberra's sister city agreement with Beijing has been a cornerstone of our relationship with China—Canberra's largest export market—and aimed at strengthening cultural, business, tourism, trade and education ties.

The government recognises the value and potential growth China presents to the ACT economy, particularly in tourism and education. China continues to be the number one international visitor market for the ACT, with 39,000 visitors for the year ending December 2024 contributing \$353 million to the territory economy.

Guided by the government's international engagement and 2030 tourism strategies, the trade mission built on our existing relationships and pursued additional trade opportunities and new connections across strategic priority areas. These included: education, tourism, aviation, response to climate change, sustainability and renewable energy. Engagement with the Mayor of Beijing, Mr Yin Yong, focused on areas of cooperation in education, tourism, culture and sustainability.

Mr Speaker, China remains the ACT's largest international student market, with over 8,000 Chinese students studying in Canberra in 2024. Our sister city relationship assists in raising the profile of Canberra as a trusted and premium study destination. We will continue to work with our universities and other partners on student attraction, the student experience in Canberra and maximising the value of visiting friends and relatives in the student market.

The government has invited Mayor Yin, if his schedule allows, to visit Canberra later this year as part of the 25th anniversary sister city activities.

Whilst in Beijing, the government also met with representatives of Air China, to improve air access from China to Australia and to Canberra. Increased tourism and education promotion in China is certainly key to this. China is our largest inbound international market. It represents 18 per cent of international arrivals and 56 per cent of international spend. Tourism Research Australia has forecast the Chinese market to continue to grow, out to 2030. With focused investment and purposeful actions in the market, working principally with Tourism Australia and other key partners, we can ensure a lasting and indeed growing impact on our visitor economy.

The opportunity of an in-market representative on the ground in China, embedded with Tourism Australia, will enable networks to be created, trade relationships to be enhanced and allow the government to maximise the impact of destination marketing

activities in the market to grow our visitor economy. We will also seek to collaborate with key distribution partners such as CTrip and other travel companies, as well as AustCham and Austrade, to ensure Canberra products and services can be provided with confidence to the Chinese market.

Mr Speaker, the government is leading a once-in-a-generation program of investment in transformational infrastructure for our city. A new Canberra Theatre project, a new convention and entertainment precinct, the Acton Waterfront development, the new University of New South Wales city campus and, of course, light rail will shape the character of the city and also provide opportunities for investment. With this in mind, the government met with several Hong Kong-based hotel companies, including the Far East corporation, the Langham Hospitality Group and the Shangri-La hospitality group, to bring their world-class hotel brands to our city.

The government also met with Cathay Pacific to discuss aviation between Canberra and Hong Kong. Cathay Pacific connects to China, greater Asia and Europe through the Hong Kong hub, a significant global transport hub that would enable two-way travel into and out of Canberra. Programs that focus on growing inbound visitation from China and the greater Asian region and Europe will strengthen our business case and lead us closer to securing flights from this major north Asian hub.

The government is, of course, committed to growing the territory's economy through international engagement. We are seeking opportunities to increase direct flights to Canberra to grow international education, tourism, trade and investment. This is all in alignment with the government's 2030 Tourism Strategy and Canberra's International Engagement Strategy. Trade missions are an important part of delivering both strategies to advance the territory's economy and the overall economic wellbeing of our community.

There are many people and organisations to thank for their contribution to the success of the trade mission. I would particularly like to thank our staff and all the staff at the Australian Embassy in Beijing, particularly our Ambassador to China, His Excellency Mr Scott Dewar; Deputy Ambassador James Fisher; and First Secretary Stuart Dingle. The embassy hosted a reception with guests from the aviation industry, tourism and sport, and education representatives and local representatives, as well as many expat Australians and Canberrans and, indeed, university alumni living in Beijing.

I would also like to thank the staff at the Australian Consulate in Shanghai, particularly Consul-General John Williams; Deputy Consul-General Hamish Cameron; and Senior Trade and Investment Commissioner John Madew. In Hong Kong, I would like to thank the staff at the Australian Consulate, particularly Consul-General Gareth Williams; Deputy Consul-General Ms Liu Bing; Consul Pat Orchard; and Consul Peter Ku for their assistance. I also thank all of the organisations and businesses that the trade mission met with for their time, their interest and their consideration.

Finally, I acknowledge the hard work of ACT government representatives in making the arrangements for this mission. I thank particularly Mr Jonathan Kobus from VisitCanberra and the Commissioner for International Engagement, Mr Brendan Smyth, and the team at the Office of International Engagement.

I present the following paper:

China trade mission—Ministerial statement, 24 June 2025.

I move:

That the Assembly take note of the paper.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

## **Evelyn Scott Preschool—Excellent National Quality Framework rating**

### **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) (10.45): I am excited today to be able to update the Assembly on the significant achievement at the Evelyn Scott School’s preschool unit. Last month, Evelyn Scott preschool was awarded the “excellent” rating by the Australian Children’s Education and Care Quality Authority, ACECQA. ACECQA is the independent national authority for the National Quality Framework.

An excellent rating is the highest rating a service can achieve under the National Quality Framework. This rating celebrates excellence in the delivery of early childhood education and is awarded to services that provide evidence of exceptional learning programs, visionary leadership and a commitment to continuous improvement and comprehensive forward planning. An excellent rating from ACECQA is not easy to achieve. The opportunity to be awarded the excellent rating is only available to services performing above and beyond the requirements of the National Quality Standard. Services must be rated “exceeding” in all seven quality areas of the National Quality Standard to receive the excellent rating.

Evelyn Scott preschool is the first government preschool in the ACT to achieve the excellent rating, and I am so proud of them. To give you an idea of the significance of this achievement, across the country there are fewer than 30 services with this rating, out of more than 18,000 services nation-wide. This is a remarkable achievement, and one that acknowledges the exceptional quality of early childhood education at Evelyn Scott School’s preschool.

It, importantly, recognises the team of educators’ professional generosity in sharing their practice with other educators and services in the ACT. This means their impact is felt by children well beyond their preschool and across the ACT. I recently visited Evelyn Scott preschool to celebrate this incredible achievement and to see firsthand the impact this service has on the children who attend. This excellent rating is a significant milestone, one that reflects the outstanding professionalism, dedication and commitment of educators and families, and the entire Evelyn Scott school community.

In 2020, I launched Set Up for Success: An Early Childhood Strategy for the ACT, a nation leading ten-year plan for early childhood education and care, based on national



and international evidence about the importance of quality early childhood education. Through the strategy we enshrined the right to early education for three- and four-year-olds under the Education Act 2004. We were the first Australian jurisdiction to achieve this, evidencing that the ACT government recognises the importance of quality early childhood education and the impact that it has on a child's lifelong development.

We know that equitable access to quality, play-based early childhood education is a powerful way to support children's learning and wellbeing and, importantly, sets children up for success. We know that this is especially true for children experiencing disadvantage or vulnerability. Participating in quality early childhood education is life changing and plays a significant role in turning the curve on inequality.

We cannot talk about children and the importance of early childhood education without talking about the critical and important work done by educators, so I would like to thank and acknowledge the extraordinary skill and professionalism and commitment of the educators who have contributed to this remarkable achievement, and it really is a remarkable achievement and result.

Mr Speaker, I am incredibly proud to say that ACT preschools and early childhood education centres are leading the way in delivering high-quality early childhood education that sets Canberra's children up for lifelong learning and success.

I present the following paper:

National Quality Framework—Excellent rating—Evelyn Scott Preschool—  
Ministerial statement, 24 June 2025.

I move:

That the Assembly take note of the paper.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

## **Age-Friendly City Plan 2020-2024—fifth annual report 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 provide an update on work progressed and concluded under the Age-Friendly City Plan.

The Age-Friendly City Plan was launched in 2020, following community engagement, to determine and outline priorities for action. The Age-Friendly City Plan—which I will refer to as “the plan”—is a shared vision and ambition of the Canberra community and ACT government. It is founded in and charts our continuing progress on the ACT government's longstanding commitment to older Canberrans, which includes having been accepted as a member of the World Health Organisation's Global Network of Age-Friendly Cities in 2011.

The plan is a whole-of-government strategy to progress a range of targeted actions to support older Canberrans. This includes enhancing social inclusion, access to services, public transport, age-friendly urban planning, and addressing age discrimination and elder abuse. The plan 2020-24 has sought to add value to existing age-friendly ACT government initiatives, including the ACT Seniors Card and the Age-Friendly Suburbs Program. Actions under the plan were delivered within existing directorate budgets, and implementation activities such as monitoring and reporting were led by the Community Services Directorate.

In May 2024, the fourth annual report for the plan 2020-24 was tabled. At that time, of the plan's 33 actions, 22 were deemed complete, 10 were in progress, and one was yet to commence.

As part of the ACT government's commitment to older people set out in this plan, I welcome the opportunity to table the final progress report in the Assembly today. This reporting covers the period January to December 2024 and marks the finalisation of the plan.

I would like to provide the Assembly with a final update on progress against each of the four focus areas. A full action status report update against each action will be made available on the ACT government website. Of the plan's 33 actions, I can report 32 actions are complete and one action has been assessed as "discontinued". Altogether, we have seen 10 actions move status from "in progress" to "complete" since the last progress report.

The first of the four focus areas of the plan—"Involved, Connected and Valued"—has centred on fostering the active involvement and participation of older Canberrans, and recognising the experience, wisdom and resources that older Canberrans bring to our community.

In relation to actions identified in the plan, I am pleased to report the implementation of indicators that report on wellbeing outcomes for older Canberrans, with 25 indicators under the ACT Wellbeing Framework able to be disaggregated by age, assisting the ACT government in understanding the experiences and wellbeing of older Canberrans. The ACT government is committed to continuing strengthening data collection and sharing mechanisms for wellbeing-related data. Promotional campaigns of age-friendly businesses thriving in supporting older Canberrans to age well were run via Community Services Directorate social media platforms in December 2024 and January 2025.

The second focus area—"Safe, Secure and Free from Abuse"—has ensured older Canberrans are able to live free from discrimination, abuse and violence, and exploitation. In addition to the significant legislative amendments which have occurred throughout the term of the plan, the following work has progressed under this focus area.

Interjurisdictional work continues on law reform to achieve greater consistency in state and territory enduring power of attorney laws. This is a significant piece of work nationally, with the ACT government committed to working on areas of potential law reforms to achieve better harmonisation of legislation to assist older Canberrans.

The Human Rights Commission continues to roll out campaigns and communications to promote the human rights of older Canberrans. This includes education and awareness raising through radio, print events, social media, letter dropping and working with aged-care facilities.

The third focus area of the plan—“Information, Services and Supports which Embrace Diversity”—has seen efforts to ensure older Canberrans have access to information and supports to promote wellbeing, active participation and independence. This also recognised the need for supports to be responsive to individual circumstances and affirming of older Canberrans’ equal right to choice and control over their lives.

Achievements in this focus area include the Human Rights Commission Amendment Bill 2023—the National Code of Conduct for Health Workers—which was introduced and passed in the Legislative Assembly. The attendant code of conduct, which came into effect on 1 January 2024, will boost the confidence of older Canberrans receiving health services from healthcare workers not registered under the Health Practitioner Regulation National Law.

The launch of the National Dementia Action Plan 2024-34 in December 2024 aims to improve the lives and care of people living with dementia in Australia over the next 10 years. The ACT government implementation of the National Dementia Action Plan will be guided by three national collective priority frameworks. Each framework will run for three to four years, setting clear focus areas for positive change.

The fourth and final focus area of the plan—“A City for all Ages”—centres on our city’s infrastructure, such as transport, pathways and open spaces, enabling older Canberrans to be active and involved. This also considers access to appropriate and affordable housing for older Canberrans.

Within this focus area, the Growing and Renewing Public Housing Program continues to produce sound outcomes, having delivered 747 homes up to December 2024. The ACT government has reviewed homelessness services for gaps that may exist for older Canberrans and is currently undertaking a strategic investment procurement for the homelessness sector, drawing on the commissioning engagement process to set out how and where the government will invest in future homelessness service delivery for the ACT.

The Age-Friendly City Plan is a statement of commitment by the ACT government to older people in our community. I am grateful for the advice and feedback of key stakeholders, such as Council on the Ageing ACT, ADACAS, local seniors centres, Health Care Consumers Association and Carers ACT, to name just a few, who all ensure that the voices and views of older Canberrans are always heard.

I would also like to extend my gratitude to the Ministerial Advisory Council on Ageing for their considered, active and engaged representation and advice on a broad range of matters throughout the term of the plan. Their follow-up on and engagement in the Age-Friendly City Plan have been essential to the implementation of it.

I would like to thank everyone who has been involved in the implementation of the plan, including all ACT constituents who provided advice to government, the community organisations who work for and support older Canberrans, and all ACT

government directorates involved in the work.

Four generations are now part of the seniors cohort, which constitutes a significant percentage of the Canberra community. The ACT government remains committed to continuing to make Canberra one of the best cities in which to grow older. As we continue to progress, we are looking to further develop the ACT government's vision for older Canberrans to be recognised as valued members of our community and enabled to lead productive and active lives as they age.

A consultation period was held in 2024, where the ACT community was provided with an opportunity to provide feedback around the development of the next plan. All feedback received from the consultation was compiled into the listening report, which was published on the YourSay conversations platform in late July 2024.

This government has committed to furthering its investment for older Canberrans through a range of measures which we will continue to explore as we move into the next phase of supporting our older Canberrans, including exploring options for a north side seniors hub, continuing to ensure that all ACT government libraries are dementia friendly, and continuing to support activities for intergenerational connection, as well as developing a centre of excellence in the care of older Canberrans, including through joint work between the North Canberra Hospital and the University of Canberra.

I am aware of the work that remains ahead of us, and I am looking forward to the next iteration of our vision for older Canberrans. The ACT government's commitment to older Canberrans through the Age-Friendly City Plan has made an impact on our community, and I am looking forward to what we can do next.

I present the following papers:

Age-Friendly City Plan 2020-2024—

Status of Actions (Final Progress Report)—Reporting period: January 2024 to December 2024, undated.

Ministerial statement, 24 June 2025.

I move:

That the Assembly take note of the statement.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

## **Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence 2025**

### **Ministerial statement**

**DR PATERSON** (Murrumbidgee—Minister for Police, Fire and Emergency Services, Minister for Women, Minister for the Prevention of Family and Domestic Violence, Minister for Corrections and Minister for Gaming Reform) (10.58): I rise to present the 2025 domestic, family and sexual violence ministerial statement, which consolidates the safer families and sexual violence prevention and response statements. This consolidated update reflects our progress on strengthening the government's response

to domestic, family and sexual violence through 2024-25.

I acknowledge the courage of victim-survivors in our community. To anyone experiencing violence, I say: please know that you are not alone. This Assembly is united in our commitment to ensuring every Canberran is safe.

One in three women in the ACT have experienced physical violence since the age of 15, and one in four have experienced sexual violence. These figures reflect a national crisis and demand urgent, coordinated action. While domestic, family and sexual violence often intersect, we must continue to recognise their distinct dynamics and ensure tailored responses for victim-survivors. Preventing domestic, family and sexual violence requires a whole-of-community approach to ensure that everyone can live free from violence in their homes, relationships, workplaces and suburbs.

Throughout 2024-25, we have continued to implement key reforms, including all recommendations from the Auditor-General's report into the Safer Families Levy, and 18 of the 24 recommendations from the 2021 *Listen. Take action to prevent, believe and heal* report. This statement outlines our progress and priorities.

A long-term strategy is vital to guide our efforts in preventing and responding to domestic, family and sexual violence. I have committed to developing a 10-year-wide strategy that reflects a whole-of-government and whole-of-community approach.

Consultation led by ImpactCo has begun, engaging the specialist sector, victim-survivors and community partners. The strategy will be accompanied by an action plan and a monitoring and evaluation framework to track progress and ensure transparency, including for initiatives funded by the Safer Families Levy.

Victim-survivor voices are central to our reform. The ACT government has funded Women's Health Matters to deliver the Victim Survivor Voices pilot, supporting structured consultation as recommended in the Sexual Assault (Police) Review Report. The pilot design has been finalised, and consultations will begin on three key areas—the DFSV strategy, coercive control, and supports for people with disability experiencing domestic, family and sexual violence. The 2025-26 budget commits an additional \$646,000 to extend the project through to 2027, ensuring that the perspectives of victim-survivors remain central to our reforms.

The ACT government remains steadfast in our commitment to working in partnership with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community. In August last year, the Domestic Violence Prevention Council's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Expert Reference Group presented *The long yarn* report to the ACT government. This report builds on the foundational work of the 2009 *We don't shoot our wounded* report, refining recommendations with a stronger focus on addressing structural racism, promoting cultural safety, supporting healing, and engaging with men and boys.

I am proud to report that progress has been made on the 11 recommendations, and a formal government response is being developed. The 2025-26 budget commits \$6 million over three years to support Aboriginal-led organisations, and an education campaign promoting help-seeking and positive role models.

The ACT government continues to strengthen legislation through targeted reforms. The Sexual, Family and Personal Violence Legislation Amendment Act 2024 streamlines legal procedures, enables more trauma-informed responses and aligns with recommendation 11 of the *Listen. Take action to prevent, believe and heal* report.

We have also completed recommendation 13 of that report by commissioning research into restorative and civil justice pathways for sexual violence cases. Progress continues on recommendation 18, with the development of a sexual assault bench book by ACT Courts. Eight sub-recommendations under recommendation 23 have been completed, including reforms to sentencing procedures.

We are also preparing for the rollout of the Domestic and Family Violence Information Sharing Scheme, which will facilitate improved system responses to promote safety and hold perpetrators to account. We are prioritising victim-survivor safety by ensuring that all information-sharing entities are well prepared to implement the scheme consistently when it commences.

In December last year, reforms to rental laws commenced, allowing tenants experiencing violence to exit leases without penalty. The review of the Charter of Rights for Victims of Crime, which promotes the rights of victims in the criminal justice system, is underway. We are also reviewing the bail laws, affirmative consent laws and the Family Violence Act 2016.

The ACT government introduced a new Work Health and Safety Code of Practice in November 2024, addressing sexual and gender-based harassment in workplaces and aligning with national standards.

Long-term investment and funding certainty are critical for specialist sector sustainability. We must also ensure that the broader workforce, including public servants and community organisations, are appropriately equipped to recognise and respond to domestic, family and sexual violence by making referrals into the specialist sector.

I want to acknowledge the skill, expertise and dedication of staff in our frontline services, including those who work directly with people who use violence. The ACT government has significantly increased funding to frontline domestic, family and sexual violence services, with over \$12 million allocated in 2024-25, and more than \$30 million committed in 2025-26. This includes multi-year funding for key programs to ensure stability.

The Safer Families Levy will increase from \$50 to \$70 per household in 2026-27, raising an estimated \$54 million over four years. In March 2025, all Auditor-General recommendations to improve levy administration were accepted and have begun to be implemented. The levy principles, developed with community input, will guide decision-making and ensure transparency in the expenditure of levy funds.

Sector sustainability is a commitment shared by all governments. In February 2025, the ACT signed a renewed national partnership agreement with the commonwealth, securing \$6.134 million over five years from the commonwealth—the first long-term federal commitment to domestic, family and sexual violence funding through the

national partnership agreement. The ACT government will match this, investing \$6.134 million over the same period.

There is a continued focus on service and system integration and collaboration improvements to support victim-survivors. Over the past 12 months, the Family Violence Safety Action Program has continued to demonstrate the impact of collaborative, intensive case coordination between government and non-government agencies to address high-risk domestic and family violence perpetration in the ACT. This program will receive funding in this budget, allowing it to continue facilitating essential collaboration and integration.

The ACT government is updating the Domestic and Family Violence Risk Assessment and Management Framework, first developed in 2022, to reflect best-practice approaches to coercive control. New tools to support consistent approaches to risk assessment will be co-designed with specialist and community sector organisations.

Over 2024-25, the ACT government continued funding initiatives that reduce the burden on victim-survivors navigating complex systems. The Court Navigator Program, for example, supported with \$1.459 million over three years, embeds Legal Aid and Domestic Violence Crisis Service support at the ACT Magistrates Court.

The ACT government is also investing in sexual violence services and strategic infrastructure to support victim-survivors of sexual assault. The wraparound support program has been re-established to provide coordinated care for victim-survivors, including those not engaging with the justice system. Independent sexual violence advisers have been introduced to guide survivors through legal and non-legal processes. These support the delivery of recommendation 3 of the *Listen. Take action to prevent, believe and heal* report.

The Sexual Assault (Police) Review Report examined why so few sexual offences reported to police progressed to charge and outlined reforms to improve the system. The review has been nationally recognised as a best-practice approach, and we are continuing to implement recommendations from this review, including through Operation Foster, which has secured its first conviction. We are also responding to recommendation 2 of this report through the establishment of a new sexual assault advocates pilot. Advocates will be embedded within ACT Policing to help remove barriers, improve support and better inform victim-survivors navigating the criminal justice system, particularly at the reporting and investigation stage.

In March 2025, ACT Corrective Services released its Sexual Coercion and Violence Strategy, which aims to create a safer environment for both detainees and staff by addressing the risks of sexual coercion and violence.

Domestic, family and sexual violence continues to be one of the most pressing and complex challenges facing our community. It affects people of all ages, backgrounds and identities, and it demands a response that is inclusive, compassionate and readily accessible.

Children and young people who are exposed to domestic, family and sexual violence are victim-survivors with their own specific and often complex needs. The ACT

government continues to invest in programs like the Heartfelt pilot, developed by the Australian Childhood Foundation, which offers therapeutic support to children aged five to 12 and their non-violent carers. In 2024-25, this program expanded to include counselling and case management for families with complex needs.

We also support young people through the Solid Ground pilot, delivered by Canberra PCYC, which supports those aged 11 to 18 affected by violence. Additional funding from July 2026 will enhance counselling support, following recommendations from an independent evaluation.

Keeping children safe means supporting families. The Children, Youth and Families branch of CSD have a number of initiatives aimed at increasing the capacity of staff to appropriately respond to domestic violence, to divert families from a child protection response and to keep children safe at home, including the family response and engagement pilot, which launched in November last year.

To address domestic, family and sexual violence comprehensively, we must also engage with those who use violence. Programs like EveryMan Australia's Invitation to Responsibility offer alternative pathways for men who are not ready to engage in traditional programs, while also supporting victim-survivors. DVCS also continues to deliver the Room4Change program, working with people who use violence and providing parallel case management to support victim-survivors. With support from the commonwealth, we are piloting innovative perpetrator responses, including supporting Multicultural Hub Canberra's non-violence program for culturally diverse men.

We are committed to accessibility. In partnership, we have developed training for the domestic and family violence sector on how to support victim-survivors living with an intellectual disability and are now funding training for disability sector workers.

In 2024-25, the Women's Return to Work Program continued to support women re-entering the workforce through targeted grants and tailored workshops. The program plays a vital role in supporting women impacted by domestic, family and sexual violence by empowering them towards financial independence.

Promoting awareness and education around domestic, family and sexual violence are vital for prevention and early intervention. Changing deeply ingrained cultural and social norms around gender roles and violence requires sustained effort over time and a focus on children and young people. Over the past 12 months, we have continued to support schools implementing respectful relationships education, including through a workshop focusing on student wellbeing, teacher development, and preventing bullying and gender-based violence. A training program for early childhood educators aimed at fostering gender-inclusive learning environments is another critical, ongoing component of this work.

A community education campaign on affirmative consent will launch in July, educating Canberrans on recent legal changes and empowering them to seek and give clear, ongoing consent. This aligns with national efforts and recommendation 22 of the *Listen. Take action to prevent, believe and heal* report. This will complement the national Consent Can't Wait education campaign.



In an important foundational step towards criminalisation, in May this year the ACT government launched a campaign to help the community to recognise the signs of coercive control and know where to seek help.

Over the coming year, the government will continue to work with frontline services, centring the voices of victim-survivors to prevent and respond to domestic, family and sexual violence in the Canberra community. We are prioritising the delivery of an ACT domestic, family and sexual violence strategy, informed by meaningful consultation, more integrated service responses, including through implementation of the information sharing scheme, updates to the risk assessment framework and associated training, prioritising delivery of innovative perpetrator response pilots, supporting the Aboriginal community-controlled organisations, and critical education and training activities on coercive control, in preparation for legislative reform. The next biennial report of the ACT Death Review is due in October this year and it will inform future priorities in this space.

I will continue to work closely with the Attorney-General and other ministers to progress government commitments on domestic, family and sexual violence.

This statement highlights just some of the progress we are making on preventing and responding to domestic, family and sexual violence in the ACT. Despite this progress, we are still facing an epidemic of violence, and we must not become complacent. We must continue to work together, to be guided by lived experience expertise, to be informed by evidence and best practice, and to strive to create an ACT community free from violence.

I present the following paper:

2025 Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence—Ministerial statement, 24 June 2025.

I move:

That the Assembly take note of the paper.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

## **Standing orders—suspension**

Motion (by **Ms Cheyne**) agreed to, with the concurrence of an absolute majority:

That so much of standing orders be suspended as would prevent:

- (1) any business before the Assembly at 5 pm on Tuesday 24 June 2025 being interrupted to allow the Treasurer to be called on forthwith to present the Appropriation Bill 2025-2026 and the Appropriation (Office of the Legislative Assembly) Bill 2025-2026;
- (2) where business before the Assembly has concluded before 5pm on 24 June 2025, the Assembly shall suspend proceedings and reconvene at 5pm to allow the Treasurer to be called on forthwith to present the Appropriation Bill 2025-2026 and the Appropriation (Office of the Legislative Assembly) Bill

2025-2026;

- (3) at 5pm on Thursday 26 June 2025, the order of the day for the resumption of debate on the question that the Appropriation Bill 2025-2026 and the Appropriation (Office of the Legislative Assembly) Bill 2025-2026 be agreed to in principle, being called on notwithstanding any business before the Assembly;
- (4) debate on any motion before the Assembly at the time of interruption being adjourned until the adjournment questions in relation to the Appropriation Bill 2025-2026 and the Appropriation (Office of the Legislative Assembly) Bill 2025-2026 are determined; and
- (5) where business before the Assembly has concluded before 5pm on 26 June 2025, the Assembly shall suspend proceedings and reconvene at 5pm to allow resumption of debate on the question that the Appropriation Bill 2025-2026 and the Appropriation (Office of the Legislative Assembly) Bill 2025-2026 be agreed to in principle.

## **Child care—early childhood education and care incident reports—order to table documents**

**MR EMERSON** (Kurrajong) (11.15): I move:

That this Assembly:

- (1) notes that:
  - (a) the ACT reported the highest rate of serious incidents in early childhood education and care services in 2023-2024, with 235 serious incidents per 100 approved services— far above the national average of 148 serious incidents per 100 approved services;
  - (b) greater transparency regarding the nature of these incidents could clarify whether this high rate is a consequence of a higher frequency of serious incidents or of better reporting practices;
  - (c) parents in the ACT pay the highest fees in Australia, with the median weekly costs having risen to \$760 in 2024, compared to the national average of \$668;
  - (d) weekly childcare centre fees in the ACT have risen by \$150 over the last 10 years, after taking inflation into account, and could rise further if more peppercorn leases held by not-for-profit providers are withdrawn by the ACT Government;
  - (e) Canberran families pay the highest portion of their disposable income on childcare of all states and territories; and
  - (f) community members and educators have raised concerns that the for-profit nature of a large proportion of the early childhood education and care (ECEC) sector may be jeopardising quality of care, particularly following recent reporting of alarming incidents of mismanagement on the part of several major providers;
- (2) in accordance with standing order 213A, calls on the ACT Government to table:
  - (a) all documents held by Children’s Education and Care Assurance and the ACT Ombudsman from the past five years containing:

- (i) emergency action notices, prohibition notices, suspension notices, compliance notices, show cause notices or other notices or directions served on or regarding ECEC providers under the Education and Care Services National Law (ACT) Act 2011;
- (ii) written notices following an incident of decisions to cancel, suspend or continue approval of a service provider;
- (iii) notifications to parents of children enrolled at an education and care service about the suspension or cancellation of provider approval;
- (iv) documents relating to enforceable undertakings regarding early childhood education and care; and
- (v) documents relating to suspected, alleged or actual criminal conduct, or risk of significant harm incidents; and
- (b) all documents provided to brief ministerial offices over the past five years that:
  - (i) involve an ACT ECEC facility or staff, and relate to the death, serious injury, or physical or sexual abuse of a child;
  - (ii) relate to prosecutions of ECEC providers and educators, including in relation to:
    - (A) any recommendations for prosecution for conduct towards a child suspected to be criminal, or other criminal activity related to ECEC provision in the ACT;
    - (B) any recommendations for prosecution of criminal conduct against any ACT ECEC providers and/or staff in such a facility; and
    - (C) any prosecution of any ACT ECEC providers or their employees or contractors;
  - (iii) relate to allegations of fraud, money laundering or scams regarding ECEC provision in the ACT; and
  - (iv) relate to actual or alleged wage underpayment in any ACT ECEC centre; and
- (3) notwithstanding standing order 213A:
  - (a) allows for targeted redaction of individuals' names, birthdates and contact details; and
  - (b) requests that these documents be produced within three months.

I rise today not just as a member of this Assembly, but as the father of two young children. I share the same hopes and fears as many families across our territory. I understand the anxiety that comes with entrusting the care of our children to others, and share the expectation that every child in our community deserves to be safe, supported and protected. The idea that any child might be harmed, neglected or placed at risk in a space designed for their care is something that no parent can accept. It conflicts with our most basic responsibilities—to protect, to nurture, and to build a safe environment in which all children can thrive.

It is through that lens—as a parent, as a Canberran and as a member of this Assembly—that I bring this motion today, because the facts before us demand that we do so. In

2023-24, the ACT reported the highest rate of serious incidents in early childhood education and care centres in the nation—886 serious incidents, equating to 235 incidents per 100 approved services, significantly above the national average of 148. It is not a small margin, having risen from 109 serious incidents per 100 approved services in the previous year—still the highest in the nation.

I want to be clear that this motion does not seek to demonise or to misrepresent our childcare sector. There are so many talented, dedicated and highly valued early childhood educators in the ACT. Those educators and the quality services they provide should not fear transparency. But these statistics are significant, and our community deserves to know whether they point to malpractice or poor regulation, or whether they demonstrate a well-functioning reporting process. This motion will expose any dodgy operators that are not being appropriately regulated, opening the door to any necessary reforms and, ultimately, to regulation needed to put our children first, because families deserve to know whether their children are being safely cared for.

Since announcing this call for an investigation, I have been contacted by current and former early childhood educators and parents, and the stories that they have shared are alarming. I heard from one educator that an Affinity centre failed to take appropriate action or to impose consequences on staff responsible for significant breaches, such as leaving children unsupervised, failing to complete incident reports and inaccurately documenting children's food and sleep checks. I heard that staff who failed to meet performance requirements were just transferred to another Affinity service, to make them someone else's problem, and that staff were encouraged to write positive online reviews to counteract accumulating negative reviews.

I heard from other educators that a Genius childcare centre consistently failed to provide basic necessities like nappies, wipes and food. Their kids' toilets were not being fixed because contractors refused to attend a Genius centre, as they knew they would not get paid. I heard that tightly controlled budgets meant that hungry children were denied second servings of food. Significantly, I have heard about cultures of silence, where staff were encouraged not to report incidents and were not supported to resolve issues when they did raise concerns.

These stories point to system failures that have the potential to cause serious harm to children, families and our community. How many of these incidents mark a serious breach of the trust that a parent places in someone tasked with caring for their child? It is a warning about the risks and failings within our system—a warning unanswered. This is something that we cannot ignore, and that we cannot turn a blind eye to. These incidents raise fundamental questions about how we are managing safety and accountability in the services that care for our kids, and it is incumbent on us in this place to respond with appropriate urgency.

At the same time, Canberran families are paying the highest childcare fees in Australia. The latest Early Development Census data has revealed that, once again, children in the ACT have the second-highest rates of developmental vulnerability in the country, after the Northern Territory. 28.1 per cent of our children are developmentally vulnerable in one or more domains, with that rate having increased in every three-yearly census since 2012.

In a city that we celebrate for offering the highest quality of life in the world, this just does not check out. We know that the experiences children have in their early years profoundly shape their cognitive, emotional, physical and social development, and we know that poor-quality care, serious incidents that harm children and potentially weak regulatory oversight are risk factors that directly affect those outcomes.

When parents are paying more for the highest rate of serious incidents in the country, while our child development outcomes are getting worse, we have to ask ourselves: what exactly is happening here? We can start answering that question by passing this motion today, by committing to transparency, accountability and, ultimately, urgent and responsive reform.

When children are injured, when abuse is alleged, and services fail to meet basic standards and fail to fulfil their fundamental responsibility to keep our children safe, our community deserves to know what went wrong, to know what has happened and has not happened in response to serious incidents being reported, and whether anyone has been held accountable.

Importantly, Canberran families deserve to know whether the services involved, one of which might be caring for their child today, are safe to continue operating. What I have been hearing from within the sector is that this is not what happens, that regulatory failure is common, and that transparency seems to be the exception, not the rule.

We have seen this pattern elsewhere. In the New South Wales parliament, the Greens moved a very similar motion last November to compel the release of childcare regulatory documents. That motion was supported by the New South Wales Liberal Party. When it comes to children's safety, political divides should fall away. But it was fought, tooth and nail, by New South Wales Labor, right until the documents started being released, exposing some horrific incidents and disturbing revelations of neglect leading to serious injuries, and of children being physically, emotionally and sexually abused. One centre hid children in a van for three hours without water when the regulator inspected their centre, because they were consistently and deliberately over-enrolled, at which point New South Wales Labor got behind a review into the New South Wales Early Childhood Education and Care Regulatory Authority. I would urge ACT Labor not to make the same mistake by opposing this motion today.

Similarly, in Victoria, a motion demanding greater transparency in early childhood regulation was brought just last week by the Greens. It was supported by the Victorian Liberal and Labor parties. What those jurisdictions have recognised, and what this Assembly must also recognise, is that without public scrutiny systems like our early childhood education and care system drift towards complacency, especially when a strong profit motive is involved.

It is not just the states that see the need for change. The federal Labor government recently announced long-overdue reforms to the national system that acknowledge that the system is not working as it should for families, educators and, most importantly, children. At the same time, federally, the Greens have called for a royal commission into the regulation of Australia's early childhood education sector, citing widespread concerns about inconsistent enforcement, safety breaches, financial misconduct and poor developmental outcomes for kids.

These policies reflect a growing national understanding that our early childhood sector is suffering from systemic regulatory and structural problems, and that incremental internal reviews are not working.

The motion I bring today acknowledges that we are seeking a lot of information to be produced and calls on the government to table those documents within three months, rather than the usual 14-day turnaround. It seeks to provide transparency about emergency actions, prohibitions, suspensions and compliance notices, to lift the veil on any criminal allegations, prosecutions, financial misconduct, serious incidents, injuries and abuse. It also allows for the targeted redaction of personal details, balancing appropriate levels of privacy with what is in the public interest.

I want to be clear: this motion is not about political posturing. It is not an attack on the sector, on early childhood educators, on dedicated centre managers who struggle under an immense workload in an under-appreciated sector where wages still remain low. It is about accountability. It is about opening up our early childhood education and care system to the public scrutiny that every good system should be able to withstand. No good provider or good regulator should fear scrutiny. Nor is transparency an attack on ministers or public servants. It is a demonstration of respect for families, a safeguard for the truly most vulnerable people in our community—the children—and a reassurance for the rest of us that the institutions we entrust with the safety of our kids are performing to the standard we expect.

It sends a clear message: if you operate a childcare service in the ACT, the safety and wellbeing of children comes first—always, with no exceptions and no concealment. We know many centres, particularly the not-for-profits, already uphold that principle and are providing a fantastic service in the ACT, often for little reward or acknowledgement. We are fortunate to have a larger proportion of not-for-profit centres here than in other jurisdictions.

Concerningly, some of these operators have raised concerns about the viability of their centres, as peppercorn leases are replaced with commercial terms that make them unsustainable. One local centre manager told me, after being switched from a concessional arrangement onto a commercial lease, that they raised concerns with the landlord about being able to afford the new terms. The response they received was to consider hiring less-qualified staff. That is the kind of perverse behaviour that is almost guaranteed to emerge when the pursuit of profit becomes the core driver of a system like this.

As a father, as an elected representative entrusted with the power to bring this kind of motion forward, and as a Canberran, I urge every member of the Assembly to support this motion—for the children in centres across the ACT where, according to the data, two to three serious incidents are likely to occur today, for the quality services and educators who want to see dodgy operators held to account, for the families who depend on these services, and for the integrity of our regulatory system. If we cannot show a firm commitment to prioritising the wellbeing of children within the very institutions that are meant to care for them, what are we doing here? I commend this motion to the Assembly.

**MS BERRY** (Ginninderra—Deputy Chief Minister, Minister for Education and Early Childhood, Minister for Homes and New Suburbs and Minister for Sport and Recreation) (11.26): I am speaking today on the motion that has been brought forward by Mr Emerson under standing order 213A, and I do it with deep respect for the importance of transparency in government and also with unwavering commitment to the safety, wellbeing and education of every child in the ACT.

The ACT government believes that all children should have access to high-quality early childhood education. Every early childhood education and care service sets up children for lifelong learning and success, and we know that is especially true for children who are experiencing disadvantage and vulnerability. Quality early childhood education levels the playing field and plays a significant role in turning the curve on inequality. The priority for educators and providers should always be the safety, wellbeing and quality of early childhood education for children, and I know this is, of course, a priority for families too. Families should, without a doubt, have visibility and assurance of their children's safety and their learning. That is why the National Quality Framework was established in the first place. The NQF sets out high expectations for safety, quality, learning, leadership and governance and the importance of continuous improvement.

The work educators do every day is complex and involves a certain amount of risk. I have been proud to work in partnership with the sector here in the ACT for decades to minimise that risk, to improve quality and to create a positive reporting culture. The ACT has one of the strongest reporting cultures in the country. That is something we should be proud of. Our services are proactive in notifying the regulator of serious incidences, and we want to keep that proactive reporting going.

The high rate of reporting reflects the level of awareness and compliance with reporting requirements here in the ACT. In the last financial year, there were 235 serious incident notifications per 100 services in the ACT. This is well above the national average. It is good that our services are reporting them and reporting them voluntarily, but we should not conflate reporting with wrongdoing, which is the implication of Mr Emerson's motion today. The vast majority of the incidences are trips, falls and minor illnesses; they are not breaches of the law. In fact, our breach rate is significantly lower than the national average. This is a credit to the professionalism of our services here in the ACT and the strength of our regulatory system.

The ACT regulator issued 150 compliance actions last year, including prohibition notices and emergency actions when necessary. It has also cancelled approvals for services that do not meet the standards. This is regulation in action—firm, fair and focused on child safety. If this motion were truly about supporting the sector, then it would read very differently. I think I understand the intent behind the motion, but I must caution against the unintended consequences that the motion could cause. Mr Emerson, through the motion, puts at risk the positive and responsible reporting culture that we are so proud of here in the ACT. I want educators and providers to feel safe and do the right thing, which means that they report incidents and noncompliance when they are required to and they can be supported to improve.

The motion also requires a significant diversion of regulatory resources that are currently dedicated to ensuring the safety and quality of education for children. Public disclosure of sensitive documents, even with redactions, could retraumatise families

and unfairly stigmatise educators who have already been subject to appropriate enforcement and action. In a small jurisdiction like ours, redaction of names and birthdates is insufficient. It is not enough to protect the identification of individuals, particularly young people.

The National Quality Framework creates transparency. Families can look up the service ratings now, either on StartingBlocks or the ACECQA website. Services are already required to notify families when accidents and incidents occur. In the ACT, aggregated data on regulatory matters is shown through the Education Directorate's annual report, as well as through RoGS data. We are always striving to improve our systems, both here in the ACT and nationally, which is why I wrote to my federal counterparts at the end of last year, calling for national change and improvement following the issues that arose out of Affinity and Genius early childhood services. It is also why, at the end of this week, I will be in Adelaide at the national Education Ministers Meeting, seeking support for my improvement changes to the National Quality Framework. These changes will have a direct impact on safety, quality and governance. It is also why I have been requesting a review of interjurisdictional reporting and data sharing to make sure that our reporting and data sharing is the best that it possibly can be.

There are always ways to improve and ways to learn and listen, but we must bring the sector along with us and not scare it away. I am absolutely committed to doing that, even if Mr Emerson is not. We must be careful not to pit families and educators against each other. Relationships, including the relationships between educators and families, are critical to quality early childhood education. What I know about this extraordinary sector is their professionalism, strength, goodwill and, above all, unwavering commitment to children and the importance of early childhood education.

I would like to remind everybody in this place that, when everyone else was hunkered down safely in their homes during COVID, this extraordinary sector kept going. Educators did not have the option of staying home. They showed up every day to work alongside children too young to be vaccinated. They showed up. They did not complain. They showed up to educate and care for other people's children while their own children and family stayed at home. They showed up and played a vital role in the recovery of this town, and I will continue to thank them for the vital work that they did.

In the motion, the way that Mr Emerson implies that the entire ACT sector is unsafe, unprofessional and lacks integrity is highly offensive and, I would argue, could have dangerous and unnecessary consequences. There is the risk that public trust and respect is eroded for the sector, the risk that the sector's trust and respect for all of us is eroded, and the risk that educators and providers feel too scared to report anything. I understand that people looking at the reporting of horrific incidents around the country get scared. We all get scared for our kids, but I for one am not interested in stoking fear in our community, especially not for the sake of a moment in the news.

That is why, when my office was provided with a copy of Mr Emerson's motion, I was surprised, because he has never really shown an interest in early childhood education and care. That is why I offered him a briefing to provide as much information as he needed, and then, if he was not satisfied, he could move a motion. He accepted an offer for a briefing in my office, and I am pleased about that, but I would have liked him to speak to my office, speak to the sector, and speak to the leaders in the sector, like



Frances Crimmins from the YWCA, Sam Page from Early Childhood Australia, and Lyndal Ryan from the United Workers Union. They could have provided him with information about what works, what does not work and what the National Quality Framework is actually for. He could have taken the time to listen and learn from them about what actually drives quality in the early childhood education and care sector, not gone to a scare campaign.

Quality is driven by well-trained, respected and valued early childhood education and care workers. When you respect and value early childhood educators you value children. I am interested in working side by side with educators, even when it is hard, to support high-quality education in Canberra. Children and their families deserve it, educators deserve it, the sector deserves it and this town deserves it. I strongly encourage Mr Emerson to reach out to experts in the early childhood education and care service to actually understand the sector here in the ACT—understand its differences and what makes it unique when compared to other states and territories in the country—and listen to them about what quality actually means in early childhood education and care. I think it would go a long way to inform him about the challenges the sector faces, but also how we in this place can support the sector with the words that we say and the actions that we take.

**MR HANSON**(Murrumbidgee) (11.36): I thank Mr Emerson for bringing forward the motion. I also thank the minister's office for the discussions I have had with her staff. Is this a scare campaign or is this just a request for data? To be frank, when you listened to what Mr Emerson said in his tabling speech, you actually heard that he was not saying it is a scare campaign and that the whole sector is in turmoil. He was not trying to accuse anybody of anything. In fact, he made the point that, by and large, we have confidence in our sector and that it is a very good sector. I share that view. The opposition thinks that this is a very good sector that works well. It has high reporting rates, and I am not suggesting that necessarily means it has more problems than in other jurisdictions. It is worthwhile understanding whether the high reporting rate is related to more incidents than in other jurisdictions or whether, as the minister attests, we have a high-reporting sector and that is good. Fundamentally, unless we see the data, we do not know the answer to that. It is pretty reasonable that we get the information, see some of the facts behind it and make our own assessment. I am reasonably confident that what we will see is that, by and large, it is a very good operating sector and that hopefully, as the minister said, most of the incidents are minor and it reflects good reporting. That would be good.

I do not think that asking for the information should be seen as a scare campaign or an attack on the sector. I hope it is not seen that way, and I hope that Mr Emerson will clarify that in his closing remarks. From my point of view, the position of the Leader of the Opposition is to shine a light. We are better off with information. We want transparency and we want openness, and then, as MLAs, we can make an informed decision and not rely on the government saying, "Trust me," because, to be frank, "Trust me" is not good enough. There are enough times when ministers—not so much Ms Berry, but other ministers, it is fair to say—have said, "Trust me," and then, when we get the information, we were right to not trust them. It is part of our job as MLAs to get the information and analyse that information. I agree that we should not try to make this a scare campaign. I do not think Mr Emerson is doing that. If the Greens are supporting this, I do not think they are doing that. Let's have the information and let's

make the assessment. I think we would all say that there are a lot of very hardworking people in the sector who are doing great work. I hope that the data reflects that.

The opposition will be supporting this motion.

**MISS NUTTALL** (Brindabella) (11.39): The ACT Greens will be supporting Mr Emerson's motion today. With all things considered, this was quite an easy decision for the ACT Greens, because, as Mr Emerson has rightly pointed out, there is an ongoing issue regarding how the early childhood education and care sector is being regulated here in the ACT. The closure of Genius Childcare centres, largely due to financial difficulties and poor staff treatment, got the most attention in this chamber, but it is not alone. There were allegations against Guardian Childcare centres, including multiple instances where children's safety was at risk. The ACT is, as members have acknowledged, above average regarding the number of serious incidents occurring here. Even if that signals that our reporting culture is good, the notoriety of some of the major for-profit providers and what they have done in the ACT should make us think very seriously about what we are doing. I think all of us here who represent Brindabella recollect the intense frustration and how powerless the Assembly was to intervene in the Genius Childcare collapse. I know this is just a motion to release information, but I sincerely hope it is a step towards strong action being taken when serious ongoing mismanagement occurs.

It is quite easy for us to support this motion, not only because the Greens have been the ones spearheading this accountability piece nationally but also because a number of the calls are almost verbatim to the motion moved by the Greens' representative and member of the Legislative Council, Ms Abigail Boyd. When I say "a number", I mean every call from (2)(a) to (2)(b), I believe. I am really grateful to Mr Emerson for acknowledging that this motion is a very close, ACT-specific version of the motion by Ms Abigail Boyd MLC. I spoke to Ms Boyd recently. She found the motion really valuable when she moved it in New South Wales. She gave great insight about which bits of the motion were particularly valuable in parliamentary deliberations. I am grateful for her perspective on the issue. She was able to shed light on how valuable the motion has been in supporting the parliament's ability—and hopefully our ability too—to hold to the government and big early childhood for-profit providers to account. The knock-on effect of Ms Boyd's motion and the months of work that went into it in the first place have been pretty remarkable. The *Four Corners* expose on serious incidents in early childhood centres used documents released due to Ms Boyd's motion as key sources.

This is transparency and accountability in action. I am certainly not at all surprised that it originally came from a representative of the Greens. Those values accord to who we are as a party, and I hope to continue that legacy by supporting Mr Emerson's motion today. Sometimes it can be difficult to give credit where it is due in politics, but I am grateful today that Mr Emerson has been transparent about where he got his ideas. We are looking forward to working collaboratively with him and the rest of the Assembly on accountability in the early childhood education and care sector.

The way the motion has been phrased certainly helps us pull together a consistent dataset with our New South Wales neighbours. Historically, when the problem has been shown to be with the big national for-profit providers like Genius Childcare and

Guardian, it makes a lot of sense to build a full image of what is happening on both sides of the border. Trying to better manage the very broad range of services that encompass early childhood education and care is not possible in a siloed system. We need to work closely with other states and territories and the federal government. Transparency and accountability are essential for that, and we support this information being drawn to the public eye.

In the New South Wales debate, as members have rightly said, everyone but the New South Wales Labor government supported Ms Boyd's order for the production of documents. Looking through their *Hansard* and from chatting to Ms Boyd, in New South Wales Labor's case, and it is similar here, the reasons for opposing the motion relate to privacy in mandatory reporting, children and families in the child protection system, and the difficulty in producing documents to the scope and volume requested. I would love to point out that there is an established precedent in New South Wales. The documents were released, and the outcome was increased public interest in the management of the early childhood education and care sector. That is a good outcome and it is what I want to see here.

I understand that the government has also claimed that this motion will punish early childhood education and care providers for reporting serious incidents. The idea is that providers would hesitate to report serious incidents if they were potentially made public. I fundamentally reject this approach to disclosure. The early childhood education and care sector is most invested in ensuring that poor actors in their midst are given the support and management required to improve their behaviours. If we continue to keep this data private, we may struggle to get the community on side. The headlines that keep appearing around Genius, Guardian and other big services erode trust in the sector overall, which is so deeply unfair to the passionate educators and everyone involved in running early childhood education and care.

I have also heard from trusted sources that the threshold for reporting serious incidents in the ACT is lower than in other jurisdictions, which is something I really hope that the findings from the order for the production of documents can demonstrate. As Mr Hanson rightly pointed out, if our threshold is lower, that would show us that the ACT early childhood education and care systems has a strong culture of reporting, which is something we really want to see. Sunlight is the best disinfectant here. Having this information made public will allow us to move forward in planning for the sector. We will be able to see where there are gaps and issues in the sector and better target them. This is not about public punishment; it is about public discussion when support is needed.

Will this be a bigger ask of the sector in New South Wales? Sure. But there is a possibility that, with a smaller public service, there might be greater onus on individual providers. I think it is still worth doing, and I think it should be on the government to provide the proper support to our sector as time goes on and the need for transparency is demonstrated. I feel that, at its core, this a good-faith motion to achieve better outcomes for some of Canberra's most vulnerable people.

I will quickly go to a couple of points. I think it is unfair to call Mr Emerson's motion disingenuous at its core. I do not think it is. I think he has been very clear about the importance of supporting the early childhood education and care sector and educators

through this, because the vast majority of them absolutely have young people's best interests at heart and they should be supported in that. What the motion is trying to uncover in large part is the adequacy of the regulatory response. It should be a reflection on our ACT public services and how we are able to regulate a sector to safeguard the interests of some of Canberra's most vulnerable people. If the government chooses to tar all early childhood education and care providers with the same brush, that is a choice the government makes.

I thank Mr Emerson so much for bringing forward this motion and recognising the value of transparency and accountability in the early childhood education and care space. I give a sincere shout-out to Abigail Boyd MLC for everything she has done to improve the early childhood education and care sector in New South Wales and across the region.

**MR EMERSON**(Kurrajong) (11.46), in reply: I thank members for their contributions. I appreciate the minister's early engagement on this matter and offer of a briefing, which I look forward to receiving to learn more about what is happening in this area.

I want to touch on a couple of points that were raised. The minister warned against conflating reporting with wrongdoing. By voting for this motion today, you would, in fact, be voting for (1)(b), which states:

greater transparency regarding the nature of these incidents could clarify whether this high rate is a consequence of a higher frequency of serious incidents or of better reporting practices ...

This was added after my conversation with Minister Berry, who raised that concern. I made changes to the motion to reflect that concern.

I have removed a line from an early draft of this motion that would have required all serious incident reports to be made public. They can include things like illnesses, which, of course, are not necessarily the fault of an operator. I am sticking to those that have escalated into, for example, the 150 compliance actions that the minister mentioned were issued last year. Again, I have made changes to this motion in response to the concerns that were raised to ensure it is targeted and is not, as Miss Nuttall indicated, tarring everyone with the same brush.

Privacy concerns were also raised. I believe the minister acknowledged these in her remarks. In New South Wales, there is a different standing order. Redactions are based on the redactions that occurred in New South Wales when the documents were released. That has been done quite deliberately to ensure that there is privacy where it is needed.

I am also glad that the minister mentioned the role of early childhood educators during the pandemic. My wife was one of those early childhood educators, and I remember her being required to go to work when the rest of us were told to prioritise our own health. She ended up with a multi-month sinus infection while pregnant, and she continued showing up to work because there was a concern around not meeting the ratio in the centre that she was working in. I am well aware of that experience. When I spoke with my wife about the potential of introducing this motion, she was very supportive.

There is no scare campaign here. As I indicated in my remarks, transparency is nothing to fear. That has been echoed by Mr Hanson, and I greatly appreciate that.

I look forward to seeing this motion pass and having us learn more about whether the regulator is operating effectively for the sake of our children, educators and the fantastic providers that will benefit from transparency because they are doing well.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

## **Government projects—business cases and cost-benefit analyses—order to table documents**

**MS CASTLEY** (Yerrabi—Leader of the Opposition) (11.49): I move:

That, with reference to standing order 213A, the Assembly directs the Chief Minister to:

- (1) table a list of business cases prepared or commissioned by the ACT Government since 11 December 2014;
- (2) table any project completion reports provided to the Commonwealth since 11 December 2014;
- (3) table any business cases, economic evaluations, or cost-benefit analyses for the following projects on the prescribed dates below, notwithstanding the provisions of 213A(f):
  - (a) Monday 14 July: the Canberra Hospital Expansion, the Northside Hospital, and Canberra Institute of Technology Woden;
  - (b) Tuesday 15 July: Canberra Stadium, the Convention Centre redevelopment, and the redevelopment of Telstra Tower;
  - (c) Wednesday 16 July: the Canberra Aquatic Centre, the Canberra Theatre redevelopment, and the Tuggeranong Ice Sports Facility;
  - (d) Thursday 17 July: Light Rail Stage 1 and raising London Circuit; and
  - (e) Friday 18 July: the Big Canberra Battery and the electrification of the Government's gas assets; and
- (4) provide a statement to the Clerk for Members when making any claims of privilege, stating the specific harm to the public interest resulting from the publication of the document for which privilege is being claimed.

The motion I am moving today is a consequence of an order I moved some months ago regarding light rail. That order ultimately led to the publication of the government's business case for light rail stage 2. The most eye-catching aspect of the business case was how poorly it stacked up, yielding just 27 cents in benefit for each dollar of investment. Just to be clear, that is not a 27 per cent profit; it is a 73 per cent loss. For every billion dollars that Labor put into light rail to Woden, their own research says they are losing \$730 million. If the project ends up costing \$5 billion or more, it means the ACT will lose more than \$3.6 billion, which is an absolutely incredible amount given the territory's fiscal position and an incredibly irresponsible decision for a government to make.

It raises the question about whether investing billions of dollars in projects that do not

stack up is a one-off aberration or business as usual for this Labor government. If it routinely published business cases into projects, we would know for sure, but the government does not publish business cases, so one of the opposition's priorities is to publicly and transparently find the answers to that question. Canberrans deserve to know how the government is spending their money. They deserve to know the basis upon which the government is making billions of dollars of investment decisions, and they deserve to know whether those investments stack up. That is what we are working to understand, and today's motion is an important step towards that outcome.

I understand that the government has prepared some amendments. Originally, there was a bit of narrowing of the scope, but I feel we have got to a different space now. I am happy to say that we are not going to limit the list of business cases to tier 1 projects. Those are projects that are valued at \$50 million or more. We are very happy that Labor is not going to filter out the vast majority of what would be captured by this order. It is not just because very few projects reach the threshold. The capital framework was first published in 2016. The business cases that we are asking for go back to 2022. The amendment that was originally discussed would have taken all of that away. On the face of it, the proposed change we will be agreeing to is minor. We will look at some different dates, and I am happy to say that we will accept those dates.

What we cannot allow the government to continue to do is hide more money than they already do. The suggested change was, as I said, about reporting dates. I am really happy to say that we have got to a position where we will get information before estimates. We were told that we would not get information until the last day of estimates. That is our opportunity to talk to ministers and the executive. It would have been another month before we would have had any time with ministers to understand what the documents mean. That would have been very convenient! As I said, I am very happy with the amendment that is going forward. I am glad that we will be getting the documentation and information before the estimates period. Canberrans deserve better. They deserve a government that is honest and up-front with them, especially when it comes to the territory's finances.

**MR BARR** (Kurrajong—Chief Minister, Minister for Economic Development and Minister for Tourism and Trade) (11.54), by leave: I move the following amendments together:

1. Omit paragraph (3), substitute:

“(3) table any business cases, economic evaluations or cost-benefit analyses for the following projects:

- (a) the Canberra Hospital Expansion, the Northside Hospital and Canberra Institute of Technology Woden;
- (b) Canberra Stadium, the Convention Centre redevelopment and the redevelopment of Telstra Tower;
- (c) the Canberra Aquatic Centre, the Canberra Theatre redevelopment and the Tuggeranong Ice Sports Facility;
- (d) Light Rail Stage 1 and raising London Circuit; and
- (e) the Big Canberra Battery and the electrification of the Government's gas assets; and”.

2. Add: “notwithstanding standing order 213A, requests these documents be provided by 18 July 2025.”.

Thank you, Mr Speaker. I thank members for granting me leave. The purpose of the amendment is to align the date for the documents to be provided to 18 July. I understand there is a further amendment coming from Ms Clay which adds a couple of other specific infrastructure projects into that list. I will indicate now that the government is happy to support that amendment.

Ms Castley’s motion point four asks that when making claims of privilege that I provide a statement. I am certainly happy to do that, and I can foreshadow just in the list here, there are some projects that are currently still in the procurement phase. So, we will foreshadow that it would be certainly harming taxpayers’ position to be releasing commercially sensitive information when you are in a procurement phase. The projects that are obviously complete are clearly less of an issue.

Look, I will not labour on the point given we are close to lunch, but Ms Castley’s opening remarks about business cases and return on investment would seem to imply that unless government can make money out of an infrastructure project that government should not be investing in it.

**MS CASTLEY:** No, just not losing billions, that is all.

**MR BARR:** Well, government is going to lose billions of dollars on hospitals. It is going to lose billions of dollars on schools. It is going to lose billions of dollars on roads. It is going to lose billions of dollars on public transport. Almost all government infrastructure investment is going to be loss-making because if the government does not invest in that infrastructure, the private sector will not because there is no profit to be made. So, I think at the heart of all of this is clearly a philosophical difference about the role of government in our society. That is a debate for another day. We will no doubt have it during estimates and during the appropriation debates, but I just could not let that statement stand as if that is the decision; that that is a factor that the government would take into account—as to whether we are going to make money from it. No, we have to provide services for the community and the government has to do so because no one else will.

And stacking up is around community benefits, not just an economic assessment. I think this is, again, something that is fundamentally different, which is fine and, you know, if it goes to the philosophical outlook and what your view is of the role of government. But anyway, this is a debate that will be had, no doubt, over this parliamentary term. Ms Castley is planting a stake in the ground on what she thinks the role of government is. I will plant a stake on the other side of that argument to say clearly: the government needs to invest in projects that support a range of outcomes for the community, and they are not just purely economic. On that basis, I commend my amendment to the Assembly.

**MR SPEAKER:** The question is that Mr Barr’s amendments be agreed to.

**MS CLAY** (Ginninderra) (11.57): Thank you, Mr Speaker. I will be speaking to Ms Castley’s motion and Mr Barr’s amendment. I have been advised that once we have

resolved those, then I will seek leave to move my amendments, and we will debate that. So, I will come back to those comments shortly. We would like to thank Ms Castley for bringing this motion forward. I think it is a really useful motion.

As Greens and as servants of the people of Canberra, it is really important that we have good information on all of our capital works projects; that that information is publicly available; that we can understand and explain that we are spending that money wisely; that we are learning from past projects; that our expenditure matches our priorities, and the priorities that our people have told us are their priorities; and that our expenditure is matching the real major needs that we are experiencing at the moment. So it is always important to have a look at that.

We are really pleased therefore to see this motion. It will bring some transparency to business cases, economic evaluations and cost-benefit analyses on a wide range of infrastructure projects. (I will shortly be adding a few more but we will come back to that later.) It will help us better understand where future resources should be directed and what changes to projects may be necessary to increase their value-for-money and their effectiveness. And it will make sure that we are able to direct future resources that help make our city fairer, more climate-friendly, and make sure that we are looking after the needs of our people now and in the future.

I am also pleased to support Mr Barr's amendments. The Greens are very happy with a simple reporting date of 18 July—that just means everybody gets the information before estimates. This is the best and simplest way through.

**Mr Barr's** amendments agreed to.

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

**MS CLAY** (Ginninderra) (12.00), by leave: I move:

Insert after paragraph (3)(e):

“(f) the materials recovery facility, food and organics and garden organics (FOGO) procession facilities, and all school and college infrastructure projects valued at or over \$25 million.”

We have added a few additional infrastructure projects to the list that we would like some transparent information about: the materials recovery facility, the food organics and garden organics processing facilities, and school and college infrastructure projects valued at or over \$25 million.

I understand that depending on where things are up to in procurement projects, we may get partial information back. That is okay. We will see what can be released, when that is released.

The reason we have picked these is that these are large projects. We are genuinely interested in how ACT government is working out where to put their schools and colleges at the moment, and whether that is tracking our demographics; whether they are being properly located where we need them; and whether we are getting those projects delivered when we need them. We have seen a number of these projects maybe



not being planned properly or not arriving on time, and it would be good to get some more information about that.

I have also been asking quite a lot of questions about the recycling facilities. We absolutely have to recycle our waste, and we need to deal with food organics waste for the sake of the climate. These are really important. But these projects have been running late, and it is hard to get really good information about the value of them.

With the materials recovery facility: that has run over the time when we were expecting to have it. Veolia has announced that that contract is worth \$850 million over 20 years. It is quite a large investment. The territory has told us that it is \$259 million, so there is a big difference there. I think that difference probably is in what the territory pays for the build and operation of that facility, and perhaps what Veolia makes from selling the resources.

But these are quite large projects, and the total contribution is only \$10.5 million from our federal government. It would be really good to get a bit more information about how these decisions are made, and also to unpick a bit why we are getting \$10.5 million out of \$260 million or \$850 million, for something that is such key and essential infrastructure.

Again, the food and organics facility is hard to get information about. It is in procurement, so I understand obviously we do not have a contract cost now. You do not when something is in the process. In the *ACT Infrastructure Plan Update—Climate Action, Energy and Environment*, the total figure estimated was \$100 million to \$250 million. So again, we know that this is quite a large project and quite a large facility. It has run late. We were originally expecting to see that by 2023. We are now being told 2026 or later.

And again, when I asked how much commonwealth funding we were getting for that facility, it is \$13 million—\$13 million from a project that might be somewhere between \$100 million and \$250 million. And again, I am genuinely interested in seeing a little bit more information about this, and whether we are picking the right options to deal with these major problems. We definitely need to be recycling this material. But have we picked the best way to do it? And are we putting up the best cases to our federal counterparts to get the funding that we need?

So, on that note, I would like to add those additional facilities into the list of projects that we would like to get that information on.

And I move that amendment.

**Ms Clay's** amendment agreed to.

**MR SPEAKER:** The question now is that the twice amended motion be agreed to.

**MS CASTLEY** (Yerrabi—Leader of the Opposition) (12.04): Just in closing: Mr Speaker, I say, “here, here” for “transparency Tuesday”. Thank you everybody for working with us on this one, and I am really looking forward to getting those results.

Question, as amended, resolved in the affirmative.

## **Road projects—benefit-cost analyses—order to table documents**

**MR BRADDOCK** (Yerrabi) (12.05): I move:

That this Assembly:

- (1) in accordance with standing order 213A, orders the Chief Minister to produce all business cases, economic evaluations, benefit-cost ratio or analyses, information documenting the final cost of the projects, budget breakdowns into federal and ACT Government funding components, and the post-completion asset performance metrics for the following projects:
  - (a) William Hovell Drive duplication;
  - (b) Monaro Highway Upgrade;
  - (c) Molonglo River Bridge;
  - (d) Athllon Drive duplication;
  - (e) Sulwood Drive;
  - (f) Gundaroo Drive duplication; and
  - (g) Drake Brockman Drive; and
- (2) agrees that any Member may take note of any documents tabled under this motion on the next day of sitting after they are tabled.

In a continuation of the spirit of transparency of where our territory money goes in terms of transport priorities, I am moving the motion to request documents to demonstrate the economic benefits of major road projects here in the ACT. For the record, I did seek these documents on question on notice No 230, but that request was denied on the grounds of them being cabinet-in-confidence. Hence, I am moving this motion today in light of the independent legal arbitrators' decision in what can and cannot be classified as executive privilege information.

I have noted with interest the multiple Liberal motions calling for business cases, benefit cost ratios and economic analysis for the light rail projects. I am firmly of the view it will assist the public conversation to be able to see similar analysis for major road projects, to know how certain projects stack up in comparison to other transport projects, particularly since these road projects are not a small investment. They involve, at times, hundreds of millions of dollars of taxpayer's money.

As the transport minister said himself last month, "We cannot duplicate, or triplicate, or quadruplicate our road out of traffic congestion." Car dependent cities spend around 10 to 15 per cent of their budgets on transport, while public transport-based cities spend around five to eight per cent on transport. Because public and active transport moves more people per dollar of ACT government expenditure, this should be enough for any proclaimed financial conservative to get on board.

This is not to mention the benefits for health, climate and cost-of-living outcomes for the Canberra community that arise from public transport projects. The money and space saved from endless road duplication can be put to use for things that make our cities more liveable, like dedicated bus corridors, fully separated cycle paths and even housing and greenspaces.

I am aware the government will be moving an amendment to expand the timeframes for provision to at least two business days before the Transport and City Services estimates hearing. I am happy to support this amendment, as long as that information is made available as part of the estimates process to ensure we have public scrutiny of where our transport dollars are going. I hope the government will not attempt to claim executive privilege for documents, given the independent legal arbitrator's previous ruling on the topic. I give forewarning that I will challenge any claims of executive privilege that extends beyond the internal deliberations of cabinet.

Since tabling this motion, I have been negotiating in good faith about a time period. I am glad we have been able to reach an agreement so this information will be available for the estimates hearing. Should the government decide not to release the information by that date, it could be seen as an attempt to prevent the transparency of this information in preparation for those hearings.

I would like to thank all members of the Assembly for their support for this motion and hope the information can be released in time as part of the estimates process.

**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) (12.08): I move:

Add:

“(3) notwithstanding provisions of standing order 213A, requests that documents be provided at least 2 business days prior to the first hearing of the Select Committee on Estimates 2025-2026 into the City and Government Services portfolio.”.

I want to reassure Mr Braddock that these negotiations have been undertaken in good faith and we greatly appreciate the engagement of him and his office in agreeing that we are doing our level best here to get those documents to support the select committee's inquiry ahead of estimates and ahead of my appearance at estimates, while also acknowledging that this is a lot to ask, and we are trying not to break the public service. So I very much appreciate the engagement on this motion and I commend my amendment to the chamber.

Amendment agreed to.

Original question, as amended, resolved in the affirmative.

**Sitting suspended from 12.10 to 2 pm.**

**Ministerial arrangements**

**MR BARR** (Kurrajong—Chief Minister, Minister for Economic Development and Minister for Tourism and Trade) (2.01): As members are aware, Minister Pettersson is away this week due to illness. So for question time for this week, I will respond to questions in the business portfolio; Minister Cheyne in the arts, creative industries and multicultural affairs portfolios; Minister Stephen-Smith in the children, youth and families and industrial relations portfolios; and Minister Steel in the skills and training portfolio.

### **Questions without notice Government—performance**

**MS CASTLEY:** My question is to the Chief Minister.

In your time as Chief Minister and Treasurer you have more than doubled local taxes while the outcomes and accessibility of local services, like schools and hospitals, has plummeted. Housing has become much less affordable and many residents feel the government has lost interest in the community's concerns. Chief Minister, do you believe the value proposition of living in Canberra has improved since you took over?

**MR BARR:** I reject the premise of Ms Castley's question. I would just point to the range of external assessment of life in the Australian Capital Territory, including being rated as the most liveable city in the world by Oxford Economics in their more recent world city analysis, together with our wellbeing indicators and outcomes there. I do note that we continue to see very strong population growth—

**Mr Hanson:** How is the housing affordability going?

**MR BARR:** We continue to see very strong population growth and, relative to other Australian cities, our housing affordability is the best in the nation. We are very proud of our city. We do not spend our time in this place looking for ways to talk it down. We are focused on a positive future for Canberra—

*Mr Hanson interjecting—*

**MR SPEAKER:** Mr Hanson.

**MR BARR:** which I think does stand in marked contrast to those opposite, for whom the only growth factor is the backbench!

**MS CASTLEY:** Chief Minister, given your claims, why have so many Canberrans decided to move across the border to New South Wales?

**MR BARR:** Well, they have not. The facts show that our population is growing faster and our economy is growing faster as measured by the Australian Bureau of Statistics. So a few anecdotes from disgruntled Liberals about moving does not—

*Mr Hanson interjecting—*

**MR SPEAKER:** Mr Hanson.

**MR BARR:** —does not make it a fact, and the facts are that our population is growing rapidly. It has grown rapidly. Our quality of life is very high, and we endeavour through our budget and through our work in this place, to make the Canberra that we all love even better. Those opposite have a very different agenda.

*Mr Hanson interjecting—*

**MR BARR:** Those opposite have a very different agenda: catcalls in question time; internal fighting; and racing to the backbench.

**MR HANSON:** Chief Minister, isn't it true that Canberrans are much worse off now than they were when you became Chief Minister?

**MR BARR:** No, it is not true.

*Mr Hanson interjecting—*

### **Business—regulatory impact**

**MS CASTLEY:** My question is to the Chief Minister. The federal Treasurer recently announced that red tape across Australia has become a serious challenge for businesses and governments, and that federal Labor would embark on a red tape reform agenda. Does the Chief Minister agree with the federal Treasurer that red tape has become a serious challenge, and what steps is he taking to reduce it?

**MR BARR:** In some areas of policy there is excessive regulation. Some of that is historic; other elements relate to the good intent of places like this that have, over the years, put in place legislation and regulation that may not now, in 2025, be fit for purpose. Minister Cheyne and others have been involved in the process of reviewing historic legislation and regulation in this place and have brought forward reforms in this area. Of course, there has been a massive leap in technology over time. That allows for both changes in the regulatory framework and in the use of new technology in order to support the activities of government.

Of course, there will always be room for further reform. Technology will enable that. There will be debates in this place, in the Australian federation and, indeed, in the national parliament about whether our laws and regulations are fit for purpose in 2025 and beyond.

We will participate in that discussion. We have signed up to a range of national productivity reforms. We have done so in the past, but one must remember that much regulation is there for a good purpose: to protect consumers and to protect individuals from the—at times—excesses of free markets or entirely unregulated operators. In this place we hear quite a bit about areas for increased regulation; we hear quite a bit less about detailed and specific proposals for deregulation.

**MS CASTLEY:** Chief Minister, do you accept the regulatory burden in the ACT has grown substantially since you became Chief Minister, and that this harms local growth, investment and productivity?

**MR BARR:** Local growth, investment and productivity has in fact been higher over the last decade than preceding periods. In fact, the ACT economy grew the most—the fastest—of all states and territories over a ten-year period. We continue to see nation-leading business growth, and we have seen more investment in our city's economy in recent times than at any point in our territory's self-governing history.

The facts are there: we are continuing to grow and to attract new investment. But that task is there every single day. Yes, decisions we take in this place on the regulatory environment will have an impact on our capacity to attract new investment, but it is often the case that that regulation is in place for a good reason. Often it is unanimously supported in this place. So it is a bit rich—after you have voted for something—to be told by you that you do not like its implications.

**MR COCKS:** Chief Minister, why hasn't red tape reduction been a part of your economic diversification strategy?

**MR BARR:** It has been. We have had significant focus on this. A number of taskforces and a number of pieces of work have resulted in quite significant change—whether it is in the planning system or in business regulation. We used the COVID period to make some significant changes to, in particular, the way municipal regulation operates in the territory.

So I reject the premise of the question. These are some nice budget day talking points from the opposition, but, really, the substance is not there behind these claims.

### **ACT Policing—resourcing**

**MR RATTENBURY:** My question is to the Minister for Police. The Chief Police Officer said on ABC breakfast radio on 18 June that police have asked the minister for resources to support the minimum age of criminal responsibility rising to 14 years on 1 July. What resources and training are being provided to police in advance of the age rising on 1 July?

**DR PATERSON:** I thank the member for the question. It is a very exciting time in that 1 July will see the ACT raise the age of criminal responsibility to the age of 14. This has been an ongoing piece of work, with discussion with ACT Policing for the last couple of years about how we implement this. All police officers are currently going through extensive training on the changes to the laws, and I will continue to work to support ACT police in terms of delivering these changes. There have been numerous workshops that have been held over the last few months, and we had a round table on Friday, which Minister Pettersson and I attended, which had a whole range of officials—from ACT Policing, CSD, child protection, the therapeutic support panel and the Children and Young People Commissioner—all discussing the future in terms of how we better support young people who may come into contact with our justice system.

**MR RATTENBURY:** Minister, what additional financial resources have been provided to the community sector organisations that are working with these children and young people, specifically to ensure the transition to 14 years is successful?

**DR PATERSON:** There is significant investment in a range of community services to support young people in the ACT. I can speak directly to the budget announcement made last week around the Solid Ground program, which is supporting young people who have experienced domestic, family and sexual violence in the ACT and have come in contact with the system.

Canberra PCYC also runs a whole range of other programs which support young people who are in contact with our justice system. There are other great community organisations—such as Ted Noffs, from whom we had a range of students here in the chamber last week who came to have a chat with us.

There is also the Safer Youth Response—

**MR SPEAKER:** Do you have a point of order, Mr Rattenbury?

**Mr Rattenbury:** Yes, I do. My question was: what additional resources have been provided? I am familiar with the existing services. I want to know what additional resources have been provided.

**DR PATERSON:** The Solid Ground project—that was additional resourcing from the Safer Families Levy. And there is also resourcing going to the Safer Youth Response program, which is specifically targeted to work with these young people when they come in contact with the system.

**MISS NUTTALL:** Minister, what is the operating model for 3 am in the morning when a young person comes to police attention?

**DR PATERSON:** The Safer Youth Response program will run 24/7 to support young people who come into contact with police. There is also child protection; that is always there to support children and young people, and a range of other services, including other family members and kinship carers that are there to support young people. What we are doing at the moment, as we move to raising the age to 14, is to have a whole-of-system approach to these young people to see that they get the most appropriate care and support, and long-term care and support, so that they are not experiencing crisis and coming into contact with police.

## Visitors

**MR SPEAKER:** I want to draw members' attention to the presence in the gallery of some esteemed guests. I want to give the warmest winter welcome to our friends from Kiribati, from the business committee of our twin pacific parliament. It is wonderful to have them here in the parliament this week. They have sat in on the admin and procedure committee. They come from a country where the mercury never drops below 25. I have been to Kiribati, and there are not many puffer jackets there! The warmest of welcomes. It is good to have you here, gentlemen.

**Members:** Hear, hear!

## Questions without notice

**Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples—Yhurwun Bullan program**

**MR EMERSON:** My question is to the Minister for Homes and New Suburbs. The Yhurwun Bullan program is designed to provide wraparound services for First Nations women who have experienced family, domestic or sexual violence, creating a space for connection to culture, country and support services. I have been informed that the property is managed by Housing ACT and has exposed wires hanging from walls, window blinds that pose safety risks to children, serious accessibility issues, and heating and cooling problems. In a phone call yesterday with a mother of three who uses the services, I was told that it was seven degrees inside. Gatherings like victim-survivor morning teas, yarnning circles for women's health and a community-run speech clinic have all been cancelled because of these conditions. Minister, what message does the condition of this property send to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women who rely on Yhurwun Bullan's essential services?

**DR PATERSON:** I will take this one. I thank the member for the question. Currently, there are teams out at the property to support Yhurwun Bullan with some repair works there. We are doing a lot to support this service. They received \$3.26 million from May 2023 to 2029 for the women's outreach program, to provide intensive case management for women and children impacted by domestic, family and sexual violence. There was also significant funding of \$1.932 million allocated in this year's budget. So we are very keen to support Yhurwun Bullan. I have been out there to one of their yarnning circles. The work that they are doing out there is fantastic. We look forward to supporting them to continue to deliver this important service to our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community.

**MR EMERSON:** Minister, will you guarantee that any future issues regarding maintenance and upgrades that are required will be funded quickly, to ensure that those funded services can always be delivered rather than being cancelled?

**DR PATERSON:** There is no threat of cancelling the service. There are some works that are being carried out, and we encourage these services to contact us if there are any problems with the properties.

**MS CARRICK:** Minister, what would you say to the vulnerable people who rely on these services and who cannot use the facility because of the property's condition?

**DR PATERSON:** The property is still being used. As I said, there are repair works going on out there at the moment, and we are incredibly supportive of this service. Multiple millions of dollars have been invested in this service over the past couple of years, and we will continue to support them.

### **Elective surgery—waiting lists**

**MS CASTLEY:** My question is to the Minister for Health. Minister, I note that in recent elective surgery waitlist data the percentage of people who are overdue for elective surgery has risen since you were re-elected in October 2024. Minister, why has the percentage of Canberrans waiting for elective surgery gotten worse since that time?

**MS STEPHEN-SMITH:** I thank Ms Castley for the question. I will take the question



on notice.

**MS CASTLEY:** Minister, why don't you publish past elective surgery waitlist data on the Health website so Canberrans can compare your long-term performance with waitlists and track it?

**MS STEPHEN-SMITH:** There is significant publication of elective surgery data, both nationally and locally. Ms Castley is referring to the operational data that is published on the Canberra Health Services website fortnightly, and that is done by Specialty. More broadly, elective surgery data is updated monthly in a nationally consistent way on the ACT health service data dashboard. I will take Ms Castley's question in good faith and talk to Canberra Health Services about whether we can add some kind of tracking, but the challenge is that, because it is operational data, data would then need to be reviewed to ensure its accuracy. It is very clearly marked as being operational data that has not been reviewed and quality assured. If you are going to publish trend or historical data, you actually want to cleanse that data or you end up with a very odd dataset. This is part of the challenge with Ms Castley taking the points in time data. We publish the data on the Canberra Health Services website to increase transparency about the different specialisations, but it is operational data and it is heavily caveated in that regard.

**MR COCKS:** Minister, have any rules been imposed on surgeons to reduce waitlist times, such as preventing patients being automatically classed as category 1 patients?

**MS STEPHEN-SMITH:** I am not sure about the context of Mr Cocks's question. Patients are not automatically categorised. The categorisation through triage is a process of clinical assessment. I am not quite sure where Mr Cocks is going with this, but what I can assure him and the Assembly is that there are guidelines and there is clinical practice, and patients are triaged by clinicians according to guidelines and their clinical judgement, not by somebody else.

### **Elective surgery—waiting lists**

**MS CASTLEY:** Minister, I again refer you to the non-publication of elective surgery waitlist data. Minister, in February of this year, you and your government came to this Assembly begging for more than \$300 million to help pay for your health budget blowout. Minister, why are more Canberrans waiting longer for elective surgery despite you getting more than \$300 million to fix the problem?

**MS STEPHEN-SMITH:** Thank you, Mr Speaker. I thank Ms Castley for the question. To put some other data on the table for Ms Castley: in relation to the elective surgery numbers from July 2024 to February 2025, the health service data dashboard would tell you that there have been 10,912 removals from the elective surgery waiting list. That is up 10.4 per cent. And there have been 12,212 additions to the waiting list, which is up two per cent. That would indicate why there are more people on waiting lists. If more people being added, that's probably an indication of why we're starting to see more people on our waiting list. So, even if we're getting through more elective surgery, if more people are being added than we're getting through—which is an unusual situation for the ACT over the last five or six years, but has been the case last year—then that

would be why.

**MS CASTLEY:** Minister, where exactly, then, has this more than \$300 million dollars gone, given the elective surgery waitlist times have gotten worse?

**MS STEPHEN-SMITH:** As, Ms Castley, we've talked about in relation to the additional \$227 million that was allocated to Canberra Health Services—the rest of that funding was not about additional funding for Canberra Health Services. That funding was related to the additional demand that we were seeing across our system. That funding was not specifically to increase the number of elective surgeries ahead of what we had previously committed to in the 2024-25 budget. Part of the decision that we made in the mid-year review in allocating that additional \$227 million was to ensure that we could meet the demand that was coming through the front door—through emergency, through outpatients, referrals and appointments through our non-admitted clinics—while also continuing with our elective surgery program. It was not, and was never, about increasing the through-put of elective surgery. It was about ensuring that we could continue to meet the elective surgery numbers that we had committed to while also meeting the really significant increase in demand for demand-driven services.

**MS MORRIS:** Minister, when will you stop blaming everyone else for your failure to improve elective surgery waitlist times in your six years as health minister?

**MS STEPHEN-SMITH:** I just reject the premise of Ms Morris's question, Mr Speaker.

### **Schools—infrastructure**

**MR HANSON:** My question is to the Minister for Education. Minister, I refer to reports that several Canberra schools have had to shut due to burst water pipes from freezing. This, apparently, includes leaks discovered over the weekend but there are also other reports, as late as yesterday, forcing very late notice of schools unable to open. Minister, can you confirm how many schools are affected, where they are and what the impact is to those schools and the students?

**MS BERRY:** I thank Mr Hanson for that question and his interest in our schools. Yes, it was extraordinarily cold over the last three nights of minus seven degrees and it did cause pipes across some of our schools, but also across the ACT—we heard from public housing tenants, from homeowners, from renters in other government buildings and other places, where their pipes were impacted by the very cold weather over a period of three nights.

Our schools were not immune to that and there were some schools impacted. One school, Charnwood Dunlop School, needed to inform its parents, families and children not to come to school on Monday because the repairs could not be completed in time to be sure that students would be able to attend school and have water running. Unfortunately, Giralang preschool was found to be flooded on Monday morning and so a very late notice was issued to that community. I understand that has been repaired, but I will double check and get that information to the Assembly. I think over the weekend there were about five schools—I can get that information as well to the Assembly, I just do not have them off the top of my head—and some flooding issues that were discovered on Monday when staff turned up to the schools.

The only school that was impacted and could not operate was Charnwood Dunlop School and then Giralang preschool on the Monday. So all the other schools were fully operational and repaired, but I will get the information on the exact schools and the issues and the work that was required.

**MR SPEAKER:** So, Ms Berry, can I just be clear, are you taking the additional detail on notice or are you intending to—

**MS BERRY:** Yes.

**MR HANSON:** Thank you, Minister. Can you advise what you are going to do, if you can do anything, to prevent this problem occurring again in those schools or, indeed, other schools across the ACT?

**MS BERRY:** Thank you. It is certainly something that perhaps the whole community might have to consider with regard to impacts of climate change and these more severe weather patterns, including very cold weather patterns that we have experienced in the ACT. Some work might be able to occur to avoid these situations happening in the future, but when there is cool weather over a longer and sustained period of time, it does mean that water pipes will be frozen and then occasionally those pipes will burst or they will become blocked. In most cases, it is the weather, and we cannot control the weather, but in some cases there might be some remediation that can be done to avoid that happening in the future.

**MS BARRY:** Minister, why are we now experiencing these problems, given that Canberra experiences sub-zero temperatures every winter?

**MS BERRY:** Thank you, and thank you for noting the cold weather that we have had over the years in Canberra. It is something that we are quite used to. But when it is minus seven degrees over a sustained period of time, then that does impact the pipes. It does impact pipes across the city, not just within our schools. I acknowledge the focus on our schools, and I appreciate the need for people wanting to have attention on our schools and making sure they are operational, but this impacted a range of different buildings across the ACT. I understand Property Group got 170-something calls for repairs over the weekend, which is extraordinary in itself. I appreciate people's interest, and I will get the additional information to the Assembly.

### **Schools—infrastructure**

**MISS NUTTALL:** My question is also to the Minister for Education and Early Childhood. The Greens have been speaking up about the clear shortcomings in school infrastructure in ACT public schools and clearly, Mr Hanson, we are not the only ones! The burst pipes in Charnwood Dunlop School yesterday appear to be another demonstration that more funding needs to be dedicated to school infrastructure. What is the status of the property quality standards audits, which would ideally be able to flag potential issues like this?

**MS BERRY:** This issue could not have been flagged. I was just informed by the Chief Minister, who plays very close attention to the weather patterns over the years, that this

was the coldest three days since 1957. It was an extraordinary experience for the ACT, and, as I said, it was not just schools that were impacted; a number of buildings across the ACT were impacted by the very cold weather, which we have not seen—apparently—since 1957.

The Charnwood Dunlop School pipe was on the roof of the school. It would have been frozen over three days in a row. Unfortunately, it could not be repaired during the day, because people needed to climb up onto the roof to repair the pipe. As I said, some schools that are very new schools were impacted by burst pipes, like Shirley Smith High School, and then there were older schools like Charnwood Dunlop School. It was not the school infrastructure that was issue; it was the very cold weather over a sustained period of time.

**MISS NUTTALL:** Minister, are you aware of or have you referred to the Zurich-Mandala Climate Risk Index within schools, and whether that might apply when you are talking about climate risk for schools in the ACT?

**MS BERRY:** I did not catch the first part of that question, sorry.

**MR SPEAKER:** I did not either, Miss Nuttall. Could you repeat the question?

**MISS NUTTALL:** Minister, are you aware of the Zurich-Mandala Climate Risk Index across schools in Australia and in Canberra? Could that information have been used to identify potential risks in pipes and things like that—when it comes to climate change?

**MS BERRY:** I am aware that it was very cold. I have said, in my response, that definitely things like extreme weather patterns occurring as a result of climate change are some of the things that we will have to tackle and manage going forward. I was not alive in 1957, but this is the coldest three days that I will have in my memory, at least for some time to come.

**MS CLAY:** Minister, given that previous answers to questions in estimates about how you will help schools adapt to climate change resulted in pointing to a single paragraph in a single document, when will you help schools adapt to climate change?

**MS BERRY:** I have been helping schools adapt to climate change, and there have been a number of programs funded across the ACT government and the federal government. In fact, Mr Rattenbury would be well aware of the programs around electrification in our school communities to move from gas heating to electric heating. We have been putting in shade sails, planting trees, working—

**MR SPEAKER:** A point of order, Ms Clay?

**Ms Clay:** I am so sorry, Minister; we are talking about adaptation, not reducing emissions. Could you just tell us about the adaptations? I think it is great to electrify, but that is not an adaptation.

**MR SPEAKER:** Ms Clay, I am not sure there is a point of order on relevance. We can stop the clock. Your question asked the minister how she is helping schools to adapt to climate change. She is answering the question—just not in the way that you want her

to answer it. But I believe she is answering the question. Ms Berry?

**MS BERRY:** Thank you. Before Ms Clay interrupted, I was talking about shade sails, putting covers over sports fields on the outside of schools, putting up passive cooling and making sure that schools can open and close windows to let fresh air flow through the school environment. We know this is something that our whole community will have to adapt to, and we will continue to do that within our school communities as well.

### **Budget—vocational education and training**

**MS TOUGH:** My question is also to the Minister for Education. Minister, the Try-a-Trade program has expanded in the 2025-2026 ACT budget. Why is this program important?

**MS BERRY:** The Try-a-Trade program, which was formerly known as the Understanding Building and Construction Program, is important for so many reasons. It is important because it opens up and provides more opportunities for young women in construction, whilst also challenging outdated gender stereotypes. We want young women in Canberra's public schools to see a future for themselves in construction. It provides practical skills, mentorship and industry exposure to help make that happen. It helps create a pipeline of construction workers, tapping into 50 per cent of the community who would not normally have the chance or think about trying a trade in their schooling or as they leave school. By expanding this program, we are helping to build a more inclusive and diverse construction workforce—keeping that pipeline going—and one that reflects the community that it serves. This program is also important because of its investment both in equity and in economic health and growth.

**MS TOUGH:** Minister, what does the expansion of the program include?

**MS BERRY:** The 2025-26 ACT budget will provide \$1.4 million over four years to expand and enhance the Try-a-Trade program in ACT public schools. This investment will double the program's reach to 10 more public schools, giving more year 8 to 10 students early exposure to the construction industry. Each year, up to 2,000 year 8 students will participate in a curriculum-based elective. This elective was developed by ACT public school teachers and is the only one of its kind in the country, and we are super proud of it. While 220 year 9 and 10 students will gain real world experience through structured work placements. I acknowledge and thank all of the employers in the construction industry who have given those young people the chance to try a trade at a worksite.

**MR WERNER-GIBBINGS:** Minister, how many students have participated so far? What can students expect if they enrol in the Try-a-Trade program?

**MS BERRY:** Thank you for the question and thank you for asking that question in such a prompt manner. I will answer your question later, Mr Hanson!

The Try-a-Trade program includes two elements: a year 8 program for students of all genders, and a year 9 and 10 women in construction elective, which supports female and gender diverse students. The purpose of the year 8 program is to introduce and expose young people to the construction industry so that they are aware of the options

and career pathways. The Try-a-Trade program gives students real exposure to what it is like on site and provides a direct link to further training and apprenticeships.

The year 9 and 10 program is a semester-long work studies elective, providing a targeted opportunity for young people and gender diverse students to delve further into the industry and gain practical experience; what's more, it provides them their white card, their silica training and their asbestos training so they are job-ready when they leave school if they choose to do an apprenticeship or an ASbA.

Across both elements of the program, more than 2,500 students have participated in the program over the first three years, including nearly 300 students participating in the women in construction elective. I want to acknowledge our partners in this work, NAWIC, who have also been great supporters of the program and have been great mentors to the young women who have participated in this program. I look forward to seeing the program continue and thrive.

### **Woden—infrastructure**

**MS CARRICK:** My question is to the Chief Minister, and it is about double standards. Chief Minister, in response to the Liberals' motion this morning seeking information about business cases and the economic evaluation of government investment in large infrastructure projects, you said, "We've got to provide services for the community, and the government has to do so, because no-one else will. Investment needs to stack up around community benefits, not just economic assessments." You also said, "Almost all government infrastructure investment is going to be loss-making as, if the government doesn't invest in that infrastructure, the private sector won't, because there's no profit to be made."

The community of Woden has experienced the loss of a long list of community infrastructure, including the building that Woden Community Service used to deliver their very important services, our indoor sports stadium and, more lately—the latest one—the 50-metre Phillip pool. Chief Minister, given your statement this morning, why did you decide to sell the Phillip pool site to the private sector in 2008, when you were the Minister for Planning?

**MR BARR:** I thank Ms Carrick for the question. The history of those decisions has been well-ventilated. I make the point that the facility has been privately operated through its lifecycle, and it is obviously intrinsically linked to the ice-skating rink. It has been privately owned for some time.

The broader point I was making was that the government does invest in infrastructure right across the city, including in Ms Carrick's electorate of Murrumbidgee, and specifically in the Woden town centre. In fact, there is probably not a part of Canberra that has had more investment than the Woden town centre in recent times, with the new CIT opening, a number of very significant projects, as well as government-enabled private sector investment. There may be an opportunity, through the next stage of investment in the town centre, for the government to be able to partner with community sector and private sector organisations to provide more facilities for that growing community.

**MS CARRICK:** Chief Minister, why are you publicly funding the Commonwealth Park pool, but you expect the private sector to fund the pool in Woden? What is your very confusing policy for funding recreational infrastructure?

**MR BARR:** The government has used a variety of different means to deliver public swimming facilities, including public-private partnerships. In this instance, we are replacing an aging facility as part of a priority project for the territory on commonwealth government land that is jointly funded between the commonwealth and the territory government. I do not see why Ms Carrick is so opposed to the territory—every Canberran—having a premier aquatic centre.

**MR EMERSON:** Chief Minister, when will your government invest in public recreational facilities in the Woden town centre?

**MR BARR:** In the 2025-26 budget, in the 2024-25 budget, in 2023-24, in 2022-23, in 2021-22, in 2020-21, in 2019-20, in 2018-19, and in 2017-18—we have invested in the Woden town centre in the electorate of Murrumbidgee in every budget.

### **Transport Canberra—MyWay+—retail outlets**

**MS BARRY:** My question is to the Minister for Transport. I note that the only MyWay+ retail outlets in Charnwood and Kippax are primarily tobacconists. Given that one of the cohorts who would use cash to top-up a MyWay+ card is children and young people, why is it that the only options available in Charnwood and Kippax are tobacconists?

**MR STEEL:** I thank the member for her feedback. I will pass that on to Transport Canberra and see whether there is an opportunity to engage other vendors that might be able to provide MyWay+ cards. MyWay+ has an opportunity, in a way that was not available under the old MyWay system, to provide physical MyWay+ cards. Of course, they are no longer a requirement to pay for public transport in Canberra, with other options now available for Transport Canberra customers. But I will certainly take that very specific geographical feedback and am happy to provide it to Transport Canberra to see whether other vendors might be available for the use of Charnwood residents.

**MS BARRY:** The minister might not have an answer to this, but, Minister, have any parents raised concerns about the government directing children into places that normalise smoking and vaping?

**MR STEEL:** I am not aware of any.

**MS MORRIS:** Minister, can you please further outline the steps you will take to ensure that there are alternative locations that do not expose children to such risky practices?

**MR STEEL:** I have already outlined that I will raise it with Transport Canberra and see whether there is an opportunity for an alternative vendor there, perhaps in addition to the existing one, that might be able to provide those services.

### **Fossil Fuel Non-Proliferation Treaty**

**MS CLAY:** My question is to the Minister for Climate Change, Environment, Energy, and Water. Minister, last term the ACT government signed up to the Fossil Fuel Non-Proliferation Treaty which calls to end new expansion of gas. Every ACT Greens MLA signed up personally, as well as the ACT government signing up. So did many ACT Labor MLAs, including Ms Cheyne, Mr Barr, Ms Berry and Mr Steel. Why didn't you sign up?

**MS ORR:** Thank you, Mr Speaker. To be honest, Mr Speaker, I cannot remember the reason why I did not sign up at the time. But I believe I did get a question similar to this on ABC radio when I was doing Chief Minister's talkback.

*Mr Cocks interjecting—*

**MS ORR:** On the question I was asked on radio—provided that I have understood that they are both the same thing—I did say that I was happy to go away and have a look and consider—

*Members interjecting—*

**Mr Cocks:** Point of order. As hesitant as I am to make points of order on other people's questions, the question was not about what the minister was asked on radio. It was a specific question, and I ask for your guidance as to whether the minister should be directly relevant to this question not another one.

**MR SPEAKER:** If I can just get the clock stopped here. I'm sorry, Ms Clay, for the benefit of the minister but also for my benefit, can you outline again what the specific question is here? I'm a little lost.

**MS CLAY:** How about I just start from the beginning? In the last term, the ACT government signed up to the Fossil Fuel Non-Proliferation Treaty which calls to end the expansion of new gas. Every ACT Greens MLA signed up personally. The ACT government signed up. So did many ACT Labor MLAs, including Ms Cheyne, Mr Barr, Ms Berry and Mr Steel. Why didn't you sign up to that treaty?

*Mr Hanson interjecting—*

**MS ORR:** For the avoidance of confusion, as I say, I can not quite remember the reasons I did not sign up. Having re-heard the question, I believe it was the government that signed up and so therefore I believe the executive members listed were the ones that did, and that might be part of the answer. Nonetheless, going to the relevance of the radio, I believe I got the same question on the radio. I know the Greens were aware of that because they have—with a little bit of social licence and artistic licence—cut-and-pasted for social media the comments I made. Those comments included—if it is the same topic, which I believe it is—that I am happy to go away and have a look at that and reconsider my position now that I have the ministerial portfolio positions that I do. I am just hesitant to say I would sign anything before having a proper read of it.

**MS CLAY:** Minister, given that many parliamentarians have already signed—including every Greens parliamentarian—this treaty clearly is open to parliamentary signing. So, will you sign this treaty now that you have been on notice since 2021 when



the treaty was first agreed to by your colleagues?

**MS ORR:** Mr Speaker, I refer the member to my previous answer.

**MR RATTENBURY:** Minister, given that you were asked three weeks ago, what consideration have you given to the matter since that time?

*Mr Hanson interjecting—*

**MS ORR:** I think, as Mr Rattenbury would well be aware, sometimes the wheels of bureaucracy and the time we take to consider things takes more than three weeks. So, I will continue to seek advice and make consideration on that, and I dare say I will have plenty of opportunity in the future to report back on what my consideration results in.

*Mr Hanson interjecting—*

### **ACT Policing—police stations**

**MS MORRIS:** My question is to the Minister for Police.

The policing arrangement between the ACT and the commonwealth requires the ACT government to provide appropriate facilities for the commonwealth's ACT police employees. A 2018 assessment found that five of ACT Policing's seven stations were in poor condition, with many precincts at full capacity or not fit for use. Is the government fulfilling the policing arrangement by failing to provide the appropriate facilities for ACT police and the people of Canberra?

**DR PATERSON:** As Ms Morris has pointed out, that is a report from seven years ago, so there has been very significant investment in all ACT police stations since then. There has been a strategic asset management plan that has seen significant investment year on year. Through this budget alone, there is more investment to see works done on the City Police Station and the Winchester Police Centre. There has been significant works on Gungahlin and Woden, on HVAC systems and heating and cooling systems. There are significant works that have occurred in all our ACT police stations to ensure they are fit for purpose to support our ACT police.

**MS MORRIS:** Minister, are you confident that the Winchester Centre and the City Police Station are currently equipped to keep the people of Canberra safe?

**DR PATERSON:** They are equipped to keep ACT police operational. We have seen budget investment this year to continue to see these police stations—

**Mr Cocks:** Point of order. Again, under standing order 118, and in terms of direct relevance to the subject matter of the question, the minister has essentially redefined it. The question was specifically about two police stations, not broader operations of ACT Policing.

**MR SPEAKER:** Mr Cocks, I think the minister has only just started. I think she is having a crack at answering the question. Dr Paterson?

**DR PATERSON:** All I was contesting was that the police stations are not there to keep the community safe. The police stations are there as an operational workplace for ACT police and yes, there is significant works that have gone into those police stations, and will continue to over the next year, to ensure they remain operational while we work to develop a business case for government later in this year to see a replacement City police station and headquarters.

**Mr Cocks:** Point of order on relevance, again.

**MR SPEAKER:** Yes?

**Mr Cocks:** The question was in regard to the current status, not the future plans for those police stations.

**MR SPEAKER:** Mr Steel?

**Mr Steel:** On a point of order under part 13.26 of the *Companion to the standing orders*:

...ministers cannot be directed to answer a question in a particular way.

I fear that the points of order being raised by Mr Cocks are actually repetitive interruptions of the minister in answering the question in the way that she sees fit.

**MR SPEAKER:** I do not necessarily subscribe to the commentary from Mr Steel, but from where I sit here in this chair, I think the minister had a genuine attempt at answering the question. I do not think there is a point of order on relevance. Do we have a supplementary?

**Mr Hanson:** I have one, but no doubt you will want to find someone else who can give it to you Mr Speaker, before I—

**MR SPEAKER:** Mr Hanson. Let us move along.

*Members interjecting—*

**Mr Werner-Gibbings:** Is he making a joke?

**MR HANSON:** Sorry Taimus.

Minister, what interim measures are in place to ensure police coverage and community safety for Molonglo residents whilst we wait for a new police station there?

**DR PATERSON:** Molonglo falls within the Woden patrol zone, so currently the Woden Police Station is staffed to patrol Molonglo Valley. In the previous year's budget there was \$3.7 million for infrastructure, which included the City Police Station and Winchester upgrades, but also to see detailed design work and planning for the Molonglo Police Station. There is also a lot of work that needs to happen to understand what the needs will be when a Molonglo police station is stood up in terms of how the Woden patrol zone will work. There is funding in this budget to do that work. It is really exciting work for Molonglo. I would like to assure the Molonglo Valley community

that we have excellent ACT police coverage of the whole of Canberra and that ACT police are there to work with them.

### **Sport and recreation—Tuggeranong ice sports facility**

**MS MORRIS:** My question is to the Minister for Sport and Recreation. I refer you to an article in *Region Canberra* dated 16 June on the future of the National Ice Sports Facility in Tuggeranong. In that article, the developer said the final contract paperwork from the government would be drawn up by mid-July.

Minister, could you please confirm if the government is drafting the contract, and, if so, how long has it been working on the contract and when this will be complete?

**MS BERRY:** Yes, the contract is being worked through, and it will be available, hopefully, by the end of this week. The reason it has been taking a little bit of time, for the government and the partners who expressed an interest to build the twin-sheet ice facility in Tuggeranong, is that there was some information the government were waiting for from the partners. We are still waiting on that information, but shortly they will receive a contract to go through from the government—in the meantime.

**MS MORRIS:** Minister, could you confirm what other documents or matters the government is responsible for, and when these will be complete?

**MS BERRY:** Once the contract negotiations begin, it will be—very much—at arm's length from me. There will be very little that I will be able to communicate outside of the negotiations that will be continuing—

**Mr Hanson:** Skating on thin ice!

**MS BERRY:** Yes, you are right. As I was saying, there will be very little that I will be able to communicate outside the conversations and negotiations that will be happening with the proponents.

**MS CASTLEY:** Minister, what other steps will the government take to expedite this process and deliver its long-overdue commitment?

**MS BERRY:** I am not sure what else we can do except to continue on the path that we have been on. We have promised the Tuggeranong community that they would get a twin-sheet facility. We have promised the ice-skate community, and we have promised the Brave. A commitment was made through the proponents to develop the twin-sheet ice facility. We have been working with them to try to get them moving on the project. I cannot force them to go any faster than they are, but I know that the community is desperately seeking to have this resolved and for work to commence. I am hopeful that we will get to that point soon.

I know that the ice-skate community, who have the Phillip facility at the moment, are looking forward to being able to utilise a twin-sheet facility. It means that the Brave will actually have a permanent home, and also that other skate users can use the facility while the Brave are training as well. That has always been a challenge with an undersized, single facility at Phillip.

I am as frustrated as everybody else. But, apart from asking, there is not much I can do, other than continue with the negotiations with the developer and hope that we get a good outcome.

### **Energy—Big Canberra Battery**

**MR WERNER-GIBBINGS:** My question is to the Chief Minister. Chief Minister, could you provide an update on the Big Canberra Battery?

**MR BARR:** I thank Mr Werner-Gibbings for the question. As members would be aware, the government has commenced the delivery of a distributive network of large-scale battery storage systems for the territory. This was a project committed to at the 2020 election to support our energy grid during a transition to a low emissions future.

I am pleased to report that delivery of stage 1 of the project is progressing well, with 75 per cent of the battery slabs poured at the Williamsdale site. The control room for the facility is due for delivery in mid August. The main transformer slab and bunding is complete, and the earth grid map has been installed and approved by Evoenergy. Planning for stage 2 of the project has also commenced, with negotiations underway for an expansion option that was allowed for in the existing contract.

**MR WERNER-GIBBINGS:** Chief Minister, how will the Big Canberra Battery help ensure energy security in the ACT?

**MR BARR:** Energy security in the territory depends on our ability to manage supply and demand flexibly. The Big Canberra Battery plays a vital role in providing this grid stability, responding in real time to fluctuations and supporting voltage and frequency regulation. With a capacity of up to 250 megawatts and scalable infrastructure, the battery will store renewable energy generated from sources like solar and wind, reducing our city's reliance on fossil fuels and insulating Canberra from national electricity price shocks. This is particularly important as more Canberrans adopt electric vehicles and electrify their homes. It is through investments like this that the government is futureproofing the territory's energy system, ensuring renewable energy is available when and where Canberrans need it most.

**MS TOUGH:** Chief Minister, why is energy storage such an important part of our energy security?

**MR BARR:** I thank Mr Tough for the supplementary question. Investment in energy storage is essential for our territory's energy security. It is not only about managing the grid but also about building our community's resilience against volatile national energy markets, especially during times of crisis or supply shortages that can impact the national electricity market. Investment allows us to smooth-out supply, respond quickly to spikes in demand and provide backup during outages or extreme weather events. That is why the government remains focused on addressing the intermittent nature of clean energy sources as we support the transition to a low emissions future. This investment provides assurance to the community that we are working towards this low emissions future, whilst ensuring stable energy and a stable energy supply for our

growing city.

I believe that is all the questions that can be asked, so I ask that further questions be placed on the notice paper.

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

### **Woden—infrastructure**

**MR BARR:** Ms Carrick asked me a question earlier that suggested I had privatised Phillip pool. I do need to be clear, and it is on Ms Carrick's own website, that the decision to privately lease the pool was made in 1979, 10 years before the commencement of self-government. Given I arrived in this place in 2006, that would be quite some time before I allowed for an extension of the lease that had been in place for nearly 30 years. So I think the premise of the question cast an unfair aspersion on me and I think it is important that the history of the matter be put on the record.

### **Schools—infrastructure**

**MS BERRY:** I took on notice the schools that were impacted by cracked or burst pipes over the weekend and on Monday. Over the weekend Lanyon, Richardson, Miles Franklin Primary School, Hughes Primary School and Fraser Primary School were all found to have cracked and burst pipes. On Monday, Shirley Smith High School, Duffy Primary School, Red Hill school, Franklin School, Gold Creek senior school and Campbell Primary School were also found to have cracked pipes. All of those schools were operational on Monday. It was only Charnwood Dunlop School which needed to close just for the day to have pipes repaired. Giralang preschool was impacted but not the primary school. The cause was the result of the extreme cold temperatures.

## **Papers**

**Mr Speaker** presented the following papers:

Auditor-General Act, pursuant to section 17—Auditor-General's Report No 3/2025—ACT Government long-term plans and strategies, dated 6 June 2025.

Bills, referred to Committees, pursuant to standing order 174—Correspondence—

Bills—Not inquired into—

Environment Legislation Amendment Bill 2025—Copy of letter to the Speaker from the Chair, Standing Committee on Environment, Planning, Transport and City Services, dated 23 May 2025.

Residential Tenancies (Posting Termination) Amendment Bill 2025—Copy of letter to the Speaker from the Chair, Standing Committee on Legal Affairs, dated 21 May 2025

Road Transport (Safety and Traffic Management) Amendment Bill 2025—Copy of letter to the Speaker from the Chair, Standing Committee on Environment, Planning, Transport and City Services, dated 23 May 2025.

Financial Management Act, pursuant to subsection 20AB(b)—Recommended appropriations for Officers of the Assembly for 2025-2026, dated 19 June 2025.

Integrity Commission Act—

Pursuant to section 189—Investigation Report—Operation Athena—An investigation into an alleged conflict of Interest, dated 13 June 2025.

Pursuant to section 278—Special report—Investigation into a procurement by the ACT Integrity Commission—

Report, dated June 2025

Report—Updated, dated June 2025.

Integrity Commission and Statutory Office Holders—Standing Committee—Report 1—*Inquiry into Annual and Financial Reports 2023-24*, dated 25 March 2025—Speaker's response to recommendation 7, dated 23 June 2025.

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

ACT Missing Middle Housing Design Guide, undated.

Australian Capital Territory Housing Supply and Land Release Program 2025-26 to 2029-30, undated.

Financial Management Act, pursuant to subsection 30F(3)—Capital Works Program—Progress report—2024-25—Year-to-date performance as at 31 March 2025, undated.

Planning Act, pursuant to section 77—Planning (Fraser) Major Plan Amendment 2025—Notifiable instrument NI2025-286, dated 3 June 2025.

Planning and economic feasibility—Integrating the Missing Middle in RZ1 and RZ2, prepared by Purdon for the Environment, Planning and Sustainable Development Directorate, dated October 2024.

Planning and the missing middle housing reforms—Assembly resolution of 5 February 2025—Government response, dated 20 June 2025.

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

Legislation Act, pursuant to section 64—

Board of Senior Secondary Studies Act—Board of Senior Secondary Studies Appointment 2025 (No 3)—Disallowable Instrument DI2025-46 (LR, 8 May 2025).

City Renewal Authority and Suburban Land Agency Act—City Renewal Authority and Suburban Land Agency (Agency Board Member) Appointment 2025 (No 1)—Disallowable Instrument DI2025-67 (LR, 22 May 2025).

Crimes (Sentence Administration) Act—

Crimes (Sentence Administration) (Sentence Administration Board - Deputy Chair) Appointment 2025 (No 1)—Disallowable Instrument DI2025-47 (LR, 12 May 2025).

Crimes (Sentence Administration) (Sentence Administration Board - Deputy Chair) Appointment 2025 (No 2)—Disallowable Instrument DI2025-48 (LR, 12 May 2025).

Crimes (Sentence Administration) (Sentence Administration Board) Appointment 2025 (No 1)—Disallowable Instrument DI2025-49 (LR, 12 May 2025).

Crimes (Sentence Administration) (Sentence Administration Board)  
Appointment 2025 (No 2)—Disallowable Instrument DI2025-50 (LR,  
12 May 2025).

Crimes (Sentence Administration) (Sentence Administration Board)  
Appointment 2025 (No 3)—Disallowable Instrument DI2025-51 (LR,  
12 May 2025).

Crimes (Sentence Administration) (Sentence Administration Board)  
Appointment 2025 (No 4)—Disallowable Instrument DI2025-52 (LR,  
12 May 2025).

Crimes (Sentence Administration) (Sentence Administration Board)  
Appointment 2025 (No 5)—Disallowable Instrument DI2025-69 (LR,  
26 May 2025).

Land Tax Act—Land Tax (Affordable Community Housing) Determination  
2025—Disallowable Instrument DI2025-55 (LR, 15 May 2025).

Legal Profession Act—Legal Profession (Bar Council Fees) Determination  
2025—Disallowable Instrument DI2025-63 (LR, 19 May 2025).

Long Service Leave (Portable Schemes) Act and Financial Management Act—

Long Service Leave (Portable Schemes) Governing Board Deputy Chair  
Appointment 2025 (No 1)—Disallowable Instrument DI2025-64 (LR,  
19 May 2025).

Long Service Leave (Portable Schemes) Governing Board Employee  
Representative Appointment 2025 (No 1)—Disallowable Instrument DI2025-  
66 (LR, 19 May 2025).

Long Service Leave (Portable Schemes) Governing Board Employer  
Representative Appointment 2025 (No 1)—Disallowable Instrument DI2025-  
65 (LR, 19 May 2025).

Magistrates Court Act—Magistrates Court (Biosecurity Infringement Notices)  
Regulation 2025—Subordinate Law SL2025-5 (LR, 14 May 2025).

Major Events Act—Major Events (CommBank Matildas v Argentina Match)  
Notice 2025—Disallowable Instrument DI2025-56 (LR, 15 May 2025).

Motor Accident Injuries Act—Motor Accident Injuries (Premiums and  
Administration) Amendment Regulation 2025 (No 1)—Subordinate Law  
SL2025-4 (LR, 15 May 2025).

Nature Conservation Act—Nature Conservation (Canberra Grassland Earless  
Dragon) Action Plan 2025—Disallowable Instrument DI2025-57 (LR, 15 May  
2025).

Rail Safety National Law (ACT) Act—Rail Safety National Law (Drug and  
Alcohol Analysts) Appointment 2025 (No 1)—Disallowable Instrument DI2025-  
45 (LR, 8 May 2025).

Road Transport (General) Act—

Road Transport (General) Application of Road Transport Legislation (Light  
Car Club Saturday Night Blues) Declaration 2025 (No 1)—Disallowable  
Instrument DI2025-53 (LR, 9 May 2025).

Road Transport (General) Driver Licence and Related Fees Determination  
2025 (No 1)—Disallowable Instrument DI2025-59 (LR, 15 May 2025).

Road Transport (General) Fees for Publications Determination 2025 (No 1)—  
Disallowable Instrument DI2025-62 (LR, 15 May 2025).

Road Transport (General) Numberplate Fees Determination 2025 (No 1)—Disallowable Instrument DI2025-60 (LR, 15 May 2025).

Road Transport (General) Pay Parking Area Fees Determination 2025 (No 1)—Disallowable Instrument DI2025-54 (LR, 13 May 2025).

Road Transport (General) Refund and Dishonoured Payments Fees Determination 2025 (No 1)—Disallowable Instrument DI2025-61 (LR, 15 May 2025).

Road Transport (General) Vehicle Registration and Related Fees Determination 2025 (No 1)—Disallowable Instrument DI2025-58 (LR, 15 May 2025).

Taxation Administration Act—Taxation Administration (Amounts Payable-Home Buyer Concession Scheme) Determination 2025—Disallowable Instrument DI2025-68 (LR, 26 May 2025).

## Leave of absence

Motion (by **Miss Nuttall**) agreed to:

That leave of absence be granted for Mr Braddock for this afternoon's sitting due to caring responsibilities.

## Richardson—shops

**MISS NUTTALL** (Brindabella) (3.03): I move:

That this Assembly:

(1) notes that:

- (a) Richardson Shops has been left derelict since May 2019 and the last tenant vacated in 2022;
- (b) two petitions have previously been tabled in the Assembly collectively garnering 1,205 signatures—by Ms Lawder in November 2022, and in May 2024 by Ms Burch with Principal Petitioner and now Member Ms Tough MLA;
- (c) despite two petitions, the shops have remained vacant contrary to significant community interest and current government policy settings; and
- (d) under Schedule 4(10) of the Planning Act 2023, failing to use land for a continuous period of at least one year for the purpose for which the lease over the land is granted constitutes an offence;

(2) further notes that:

- (a) a survey undertaken by the office of Miss Nuttall MLA with 203 respondents from the area found that 95 percent of respondents favoured the shops being redeveloped; and
- (b) the following percentage of respondents favoured the following uses for the site:
  - (i) 82 percent: commercial property;
  - (ii) 38 percent: community group centres;



- (iii) 37 percent: community services; and
- (iv) 35 percent: shop-top housing;
- (3) calls on the ACT Government to:
  - (a) negotiate with the owner to ensure appropriate use of the Richardson Shops site aligned with community desires by 31 December 2025;
  - (b) investigate why the shops were left empty for three years and how similar situations could be avoided;
  - (c) review the process for offering crown leases and consider whether it be mandatory to include a withdrawal clause to safeguard against properties left vacant for a year or more;
  - (d) investigate policy changes to effectively disincentivise leaving commercial properties vacant contrary to community interest, such as:
    - (i) stronger enforcement of existing compliance mechanisms (such as Schedule 4(10) of the *Planning Act 2023*);
    - (ii) an additional levy on vacant retail properties;
    - (iii) provision to add withdrawal clauses to crown leases should they be left vacant for more than one year;
    - (iv) provision of subsidised community space; and
    - (v) other changes to the Planning Act to disincentivise shop squatting; and
  - (e) by the last sitting week of 2025 and quarterly thereafter until a tenant has been found, provide a report to the Assembly on the following elements:
    - (i) identify which policy changes have been implemented and provide timelines for policy changes which are intended to take place;
    - (ii) verify whether Richardson Shops has—or will shortly have—a tenant that meets community need; and
    - (iii) if a tenant has not been found, take action to enforce compliance with Schedule 4(10) of the *Planning Act 2023*; and
- (4) calls on the owners of the Richardson Shops site to:
  - (a) proactively and constructively engage with the local Richardson community on the community need for the Richardson Shops site;
  - (b) work collaboratively with the ACT Government to find a solution that prioritises the Richardson community's vision for the site; and
  - (c) comply with Schedule 4(10) of the *Planning Act 2023* and arrange for the site to be used in line with the lease purpose clause and community expectations as soon as possible but by no later than 31 December 2025.

This motion has been a long time coming, and a small part of my soul is healing today, now that I finally get to properly debate Richardson shops in the chamber.

I have lived up the street from Richardson shops for 80 per cent of my life. I am living one suburb over now, but when Richardson shops first lost its supermarket back in 2019, I was still living in Richardson, and it was the first time I had ever properly understood the importance of local politics.

For anyone walking past at the time, it was a pretty grim experience. First, the community had lost access to their local shops—for some, the only shops within walking distance. As the supermarket shopfront remained vacant, we all watched the windows being smashed, replaced and smashed again. It remained an accessibility issue for anyone who did not own a car and could not walk for long distances. Good luck with getting a bus to buy groceries on the weekend. I have tried, and two hours is not a helpful frequency.

Rumours started to spread. Why did the shops close in the first place? Why hadn't we got another supermarket there yet? They went largely unchecked, and reinforced themselves as people grew more and more frustrated.

There was a lot of respect for Katarna's, the hairdressers, who stuck it out in the building for another three years, before they eventually moved out to Greenway, where they are now thriving. They were the last bastion of civilisation—the only thing keeping the site from falling into dereliction. This was quickly proved to be correct, as the windows were boarded up, some really ugly, nasty graffiti emerged, and doughnut marks appeared mysteriously in the car park overnight.

Community frustrations continued to grow; and, credit where credit is due, they channelled this frustration into not just one but two petitions over the last term of government. The first came from a lovely woman working at Katarna's—not the owner, as was mistakenly reported in news outlets. This local resident worked for the now retired Liberal member for Brindabella, Ms Nicole Lawder MLA, and called on the government to better incentivise business owners to occupy local suburban shopfronts, incentivise owners to lease shopfronts rather than leaving them vacant, and upgrade the surrounding area. That was back in 2022, about eight months after Katarna's moved out.

The next petition came from our wonderful petitioner-turned-colleague from Labor, Ms Caitlin Tough, and sponsored by retired Labor member for Brindabella Ms Joy Burch MLA last year. Ms Tough knows this petition far better than I do, and I hope she corrects me if I mess up. It called on the government to seek an update from the owners on a future plan for the site, provide advice on owners' obligations to meet the use of the land agreement, provide advice on what residents could do to compel the owners to provide a public good, advice on alternative uses for the site, and changes to planning rules.

This was a great petition, and it kicked off the process of investigating compliance measures alongside incentives to keep the shops open. Unfortunately, the verdict still came back from government that there was nothing further that they could do to compel the owner to fill the site, and from that we extrapolated that residents would just have to wait indefinitely.

While I am on the subject of giving credit where credit is due, I would also like to acknowledge Ms Morris's work as an inspiration for the format of this motion. We took serious note of her community survey and the way it was referenced in her subsequent motion on the proposed phone tower at Fadden Pond. Personally, I think it is an excellent method of community engagement, and I hope it catches on within the chamber because it provides a great way of drawing the community voice into our

motions and negotiations. It certainly informed my deliberations on her motion.

We launched our own community survey on Richardson shops a few weeks ago, and since then we have received 203 responses. I am exceptionally grateful that people took the time out of their day to do the survey. For those who did not get a chance to do the survey before it closed, I listed the key takeaways in the calls in this motion, and we have released a more comprehensive listening report, with a breakdown of statistics and some great quotes from residents which anyone listening can find on our website.

The first thing that jumped out, unsurprisingly, was that the vast majority of residents—95 per cent—wanted the shops redeveloped rather than demolished or, god forbid, left vacant. This makes sense based on previous petitions and everything that Brindabella members would have heard on the doors.

Our next question broke down what people actually wanted on the site. This was really important to me, because it was designed to put power back in the hands of community, the people who actually use the site. People were pretty clear about what they wanted. By far the most popular, at over 80 per cent, was commercial property or shops. When people elaborated on shops, there was really strong support for a supermarket like the one we used to have, a café, a bakery, a chemist, a restaurant, and a hairdresser. Someone suggested a florist, which I thought was really cute and romantic. In strong contention, at around 35 to 38 per cent of support, were shop-top housing, community services and community group centres.

We did not get a chance to write this next bit in the survey, but a further breakdown of results found that, of those residents that wanted commercial property, 64 per cent of them also selected some kind of community centre, hub or housing. I think this tells us about the kind of people we have in Richardson, which is that they value community.

This is one of the big things that jumped out at the community barbecue that we ran a couple of weeks ago. I remember chatting to the lovely Lorraine, who suggested having a place where you could do crafts or have some kind of social activity where people could gather in the one place. Ian talked about how he was really concerned about the growing number of Canberrans who did not have access to safe, comfortable and affordable housing, and the opportunity to house people who are currently homeless.

You could see that sense of community in the way that people were so eager to chat to each other. They braved the bone-deep cold for a couple of hours while conversations flowed. I would like to acknowledge my grandparents, who are in the gallery today, who also braved the cold on that day. As a community, across the board, we are hungry for that kind of connection. A barbecue is a good start, but nothing beats a permanent community focal point.

In fact, look no further than Food on Four, a fantastic local food van run by Archie and Linda. They understand the importance of community. Every morning for the past six weeks or so, they have been set up next to Richardson shops and the Richardson Primary School, providing people with hot coffee and hot chocolate, cinnamon doughnuts that they will warm up for you on the spot, and great chats. They kept everyone's hands warm by providing hot drinks at the barbecue on the weekend, and we are very grateful for that.

I would also like to acknowledge one of the owners of Richardson shops, George, who came to our barbecue to chat with the community and genuinely listen to their vision for the site. Poor George; I think I have bothered him by email once a month since February. I give credit to the community for generating that momentum and buzz. It really does bring people to the table.

George did not have to come out on a cold Sunday, but I am really glad that he did. One of the reasons that the community has been frustrated until now is that there has previously been no clear path communicated to them about what has been happening with the site. Giving the community a more open line of communication with key decision-makers, owners and government, is a promising step forward.

After speaking to George, I am hopeful that we will be able to find a way forward that works for the community, for the government and for the owners of the Richardson shops site. I am grateful for the time and insight he has provided to me and my team on the history of the block and the challenges of the area. I hope that the same information will assist government when they negotiate on the future of the shops, as my motion calls on them to do.

Through my motion, I wanted to start with the incentives, because that is what will get the best outcome for the community, if we assume everyone is acting in good faith. However, it is also really important to draw learnings from the Richardson shops case study, because, at the end of the day, the Richo shops site has been largely left vacant for six years, and it is the community that has internalised that loss. That is why I am asking the government to explore a number of ways to prevent the problem from happening in the future or address it more effectively when our planning system is not addressing adverse outcomes.

One big challenge of the Richardson shops block and other blocks is the absence of a withdrawal clause—something that says government can take meaningful action if the block is left vacant for more than a year or so. One thing that government could do would be to develop a policy of including these kinds of withdrawal clauses in all new crown leases for commercial purposes. You would hope that it would be rare for government actually to have to use these clauses, but just having them there would serve as a sufficient deterrent to any landlord tempted to leave a property vacant rather than enabling a small business to set up in the area.

With respect to those properties that do not have withdrawal clauses and are inexplicably left vacant indefinitely, I have asked the government to look into the policy levers to deter shop-squatting. This could take the form of a levy on vacant commercial properties. Before members laugh, let me stake my claim on the fact that, especially when the government has intimated that it is in a bit of a tight spot with the budget, any measure to raise revenue from commercial properties that are otherwise providing zero community benefit should not be dismissed out of hand—or that you find a way to add withdrawal clauses after the fact or find a way for government to fairly subsidise the space for community use. As the Richardson community would say, “Anything is better than nothing at this point.”

Sometimes—and I know this is a last resort—it comes down to compliance. But there

is a bit in the Planning Act, schedule 4(10), that I feel we are not using to its full extent. Schedule 4(10) says that it constitutes an offence if you do not use a property for the purpose for which it is intended for a year or more. The government acknowledged this in their letter to my colleague Ms Clay, in response to the community petition that she sponsored on Big Splash, another well-known, beloved local landmark left vacant. Government currently are not using this power, but I think that, in cases where they have exhausted other options and the power exists, maybe they should.

I thought I would go down to the wire here, when I was writing this last night, but I actually have a good five minutes left. I anticipate that both Ms Tough and Ms Morris will have some amendments, which I would love to speak to, so I will wrap up now. I say to everyone who is present or watching online: please stay tuned for the rest of the debate.

**MR PARTON** (Brindabella) (3.13): The people of Richardson deserve to have a supermarket. It has been far too long. As a local member, I am pleased to see this motion being presented to the chamber. I have some concerns about some aspects of it. This is one of those odd matters where there is no opposing argument. There is not a group that has a petition going that says, “Keep Richardson shops closed.” There is not one of those groups. Everybody—the people that live in the suburbs, all of us here, the shop owner—wants to see the same outcome for the Richardson shops; that is, to have, again, shops operating in Richardson. We are all on a unity ticket.

Having said that, there are some aspects of this motion that give us a little bit of grief. For starters, I refer to clause (3)(a) of Miss Nuttall’s motion, where she calls upon the government to negotiate with the owner of the shops to ensure appropriate use of the shops. Do you not think they are already doing that? Do you think that this is something that they will commence doing because this motion gets up? I would have said, respectfully—it is difficult for me to say it respectfully—that there is negotiation going on, and I was pleased to hear in your speech that you are also participating in that negotiation on a direct basis, because I think that is important.

Clause (3)(a) is also classic cart-before-the-horse stuff, though. In this clause, Miss Nuttall calls on the government to ensure appropriate use by 31 December this year, but in the very next clause she calls for an investigation into why the shops have been left empty for three years, with this massive, wide range of matters to be investigated so that we can discover exactly what we are dealing with here.

The motion concedes that the mover does not actually know why the shops have remained vacant, and that is fine, but it calls for a mandatory solution date in just six months time. I do not know that that is quite reasonable. For Miss Nuttall’s benefit, the shops are empty because there is no demand to lease the space. That is the biggest reason why the shops are vacant. There is no demand to lease the space. As much as Miss Nuttall would like to be living in some socialist utopia where the government does everything, we still rely on capitalism. As flawed as it is, we still rely on capitalism to get some things done.

The shops are empty because there is no demand to lease the space. In the commercial world, if it is not possible for someone to make money out of a potential venture, they just do not undertake the venture. And that is the biggest thing. As frustrating as it is

for the people of Richardson, that is the biggest thing that is going on here. The landlords likely do not have the cash or resources to develop the space when they are not likely to get a tenant, and they are not going to have a tenant come in and not pay any rent.

In the debate on this motion, we are all debating whether or not the landlord should be punished for the market forces and the government taxes and charges which have led to the shops remaining vacant. The landlord is paying rates for the property, and I am sure you have had this conversation with George. The landlord is paying rates for the property and getting zero return. Of course, they want to have a tenant in place. Of course, they do.

The Greens are always trying to get votes from people who do not own any assets and, as such, they often seek to demonise anyone who does own an asset. “How dare they?” “How dare they have worked hard, taken risks and paid heed to sensible accounting advice?” By and large, most of that schtick comes in the arguments over rentals. That is where it comes about—that anyone who owns an asset should be gouged; we should get more money from them, because they must have so much money, and we need to squeeze that money out of them. All business owners are evil, all landlords are evil, and all we have to do to balance the budget is to keep going back to the geese that lay the golden eggs and keep on getting more eggs, and everything will balance.

I know that is a hyperbolic, extreme way to categorise the argument, and I think that there is some genuine goodwill in what is going on here today. But commercial demand is limited because consumer demand is changing in a way that is impacting the viability of community retail. Something will be passed today, so I hope that the investigation that comes out of this motion from Miss Nuttall will shine more of a light on exactly what is going on because, at the end of the day, we do not want this to happen in other retail premises around Canberra.

As much as consumers want to see their local shops up and firing, it requires a circumstance where the business owner can actually make a profit. Nobody is getting into business to lose money. That situation is not helped by rapidly increasing costs, which, in this city, often tip marginally viable businesses into a non-viable situation. These costs include the costs of staffing, overheads, insurances, licences, compliance costs and, above all, wildly escalating commercial rates. Again, I understand that, in the world of the Greens, the bottom line does not necessarily matter. I get it, but it kind of does matter when it comes to businesses.

An additional complexity to this situation is that, if the landowner thinks outside the box—and I know it has already been discussed in the early part here—and wants to maximise the commercial viability of the block of land, if they look to try some of the things that have been suggested by constituents—some form of mixed-use development—often it runs into devastatingly high lease variation charges in the ACT. The LVC often makes such a change of use absolutely unviable. Ms Tough can see that, and that is why she has, in her amendments, included the things that are currently included that can be done, because as soon as you step outside the realm of what is actually in the current zone, you have some serious problems in making it stack up.

In the commercial world, if you cannot make money out of doing something, you are

just not going to do it. That is why we will see some amendments from Ms Morris. I know there will be amendments from Ms Tough, and some of them look to be quite sensible. I note that, when it comes to the investigation of why these shops have remained vacant for six years, the suggestion that it has anything to do with government charges and anything to do with decisions that have been made by ACT government has been neglected.

I understand that some amendments will be moved by Ms Morris. I hope that I am proved wrong; my understanding is that those amendments will not get up. We will examine all of these things as to why Richardson shops have remained closed, but it is a matter of saying, “We will not examine these over here. We will not examine the government fees because we will try to find a different solution.”

Ms Morris’s amendments seek to add the cumulative effect of a large range of government charges and compliance on the viability of suburban businesses and an investigation into the devastating effect of the lease variation charge on any attempt to maximise the commercial viability of suburban shops by diversifying their use. Those things should be examined. If we are serious about finding solutions here, they should be examined.

With respect to the section of the motion that calls on the owners of the Richardson shops to do all sorts of things, I am looking around the gallery to see whether I can see the owners. I cannot see the owners of Richardson shops here. In reality, in the context of a private member’s motion in this Assembly, this Assembly has as much jurisdiction over the owners of Richardson shops as we have over President Trump, in terms of calling for the President of the United States to do something.

Again, I take my hat off to Miss Nuttall, who has directly engaged with the owners of Richardson shops, because I think that is the way to do it. But passing a “calls on” in a motion here will not achieve anything, other than giving Miss Nuttall the ability to get back to the people who participated in her engagement and say, “We asked them nicely; we tried.” I think we need to get into the real world and investigate the reasons behind the closure of the Richardson shops, while including all of the possible causes because, whichever way you look at it, the government must carry some of the blame—not all of it. Retail is changing and many things have changed since the days when Richardson shops were open. But we cannot ignore the impact that government charges and compliance have had on why those shops remain closed.

I hope that one day we will be celebrating the reopening of those shops and, as such, I am pleased that we are debating it here today.

**MS TOUGH:** by leave, I move the amendments circulated in my name:

1. After paragraph (1)(d), insert new paragraphs:

“(e) the site is zoned CZ4 – Local Centre Zone in the Territory Plan 2023, permissible land use under the current Commercial Zones Policy within the CZ4 zone includes: an animal care facility, bulky good retailing, business agency, café, community activity centre, craft workshop, drink establishment, early childhood education and care, health facility, indoor entertainment facility, multi-unit housing, office, produce market,

- restaurant, shop, take-away food shop, veterinary clinic and veterinary hospital;
- (f) there are three, undeveloped and unleased ACT Government sites adjacent to the Richardson shops site; and
  - (g) in 2020 the ACT Government opened a new playground next to the Richardson shops;”.
2. Omit all text after paragraph (3)(b), substitute:
- “(c) review the process for issuing and renewing crown leases, including purpose and withdrawal clause requirements, to safeguard against properties left vacant for a year or more;
  - (d) investigate tougher measures for property owners who leave their shop spaces vacant or unused, such as:
    - (i) stronger enforcement of existing compliance mechanisms (such as Schedule 4(10) of the Planning Act 2023);
    - (ii) an additional levy on vacant retail properties;
    - (iii) provision to add withdrawal clauses to Crown Leases should they be left vacant for more than one year;
    - (iv) provision of subsidised community space; and
    - (v) other changes to the Planning Act to disincentive shop squatting;
  - (e) review planning controls around the Richardson local centre including opportunities to encourage mixed-use development such as ‘shop-top’ housing;
  - (f) release the undeveloped, unleased sites to the north of the Richardson shops site to support the broader redevelopment of the local centre;
  - (g) report back to the Assembly by the last sitting week of 2025, and every six months thereafter until a tenant has been found, on the above measures and:
    - (i) verify whether Richardson Shops has – or will shortly have – a tenant that meets community need;
    - (ii) if a tenant has not been found, take action to enforce compliance with Schedule 4(10) of the *Planning Act 2023*;
- (4) calls on the owners of the Richardson Shops site to:
- (a) proactively and constructively engage with the local Richardson community on the community need for the Richardson Shops site;
  - (b) work collaboratively with the ACT Government to find a solution that prioritises the Richardson community’s vision for the site; and
  - (c) comply with Schedule 4(10) of the *Planning Act 2023* and arrange for the site to be used in line with the lease purpose clause and community expectations as soon as possible but by no later than 31<sup>st</sup> December 2025.”.

I speak in support of Miss Nuttall’s motion on the Richardson shops. It should be no shock to anyone in the chamber that this is an issue close to my heart. Last year, I endeavoured to have a petition presented to the Assembly that focused on this very issue. The petition was presented in May 2024 by the former member for Brindabella and former Speaker Ms Joy Burch. In total, we had over 700 signatures gathered online



and in person, through knocking on doors and standing at the Chisholm and Calwell shops. Sadly, although there were over 700 signatures, there was no Assembly inquiry into the petition or a government response, so I welcome this motion as a way of investigating what is happening at the Richardson shops.

The petition calls on the ACT government to seek a full update from the owner on any future plans at the site and to provide advice on what obligations the owner has in meeting the conditions of the land use agreement. It further calls on the government to provide advice on what the residents can do to compel owners to provide a public good, what alternative use for the land could look like and what changes could be made to crown leases, and to report back any findings to the Assembly. Now that I am here in the Assembly, I am really pleased to move amendments to the motion and take up the cause for Richardson shops from the inside.

Through the petition, I had the opportunity to meet many residents in the area and talk about the shops. Whether it was at their door, on the phone or at a different shopping centre, one thing was certain: the people of Richardson and surrounding areas wish for the site to be revitalised so it can provide services, recreation and entertainment once again. Local shops can often be the hub for a small community, providing a place for children to hang out after school and for parents to pick up bread and milk on their way home or to be a nice nearby spot to have a coffee with friends. There used to be a time when Richardson shops fulfilled this role as a community hub, with a supermarket, a hairdresser and other local shops, including a hardware shop, providing these services to residents.

I have a good friend who grew up just down the street who often tells me about what it was like going to the Richardson shops after primary school and what it has been like since it closed. I have also spoken to Miss Nuttall at length about her experiences growing up in the area. When I lived in Calwell a decade ago, there was still a supermarket in Richardson. It was much easier to stop there quickly for something at the supermarket on the way home rather than trying to navigate the busy Calwell centre at 5.30 in the evening and finding a park. However, unfortunately this has not been the case for quite a few years. Watching it get quieter and fall into disrepair has been really sad. In May 2019, the local supermarket closed, forcing the Richardson community to shop at nearby centres in Calwell and Chisholm rather than being able to buy groceries only a few streets away from their house. The situation got progressively worse over the next year, with the last tenant, the hairdresser, closing a few years ago. Some shops at the site have been vacant for as long as nine years.

The entire precinct, as we speak, is currently in a state of derelict neglect, covered in graffiti and often a site with dumped rubbish. Neighbours nearby have told me about hearing squatters and antisocial behaviour on weekends. It is an eyesore for people driving past and its proximity to both the local primary school and the playground, which the ACT government invested in and constructed in 2020, means that any potential antisocial behaviour that the site attracts is far too close to children. This is obviously an untenable situation.

I thank Miss Nuttall for bringing the motion to the Assembly today. I look forward to working alongside her, Minister Steel and the ACT government to get the ball rolling with the Richardson community to deliver a new local shop that they deserve to the

suburb. It is nice to have other members of the Assembly, like Ms Morris, the Speaker, and you, Mr Assistant Speaker Mr Werner-Gibbings, also advocating for Richardson. I thank Miss Nuttall for working with me in good faith on the amendments this week and also thank Ms Morris for her time to discuss her amendments today. While we will not be supporting them, it was still great to discuss them with her. It is great for the members of Brindabella to come together to talk about the future of Richardson shops and what we can do.

In my amendment, there are three major objectives, all focused on enhancing what we can do to solve the issues around Richardson shops and bring new life to the area. The most important one to me is calling on the ACT government to work towards releasing the three undeveloped and unreleased sites just north of the Richardson shops site to promote future development in the area. This could be housing, shops or a mix of both. I would love to see some shop-top housing, because it not only aligns with the missing middle reforms of this government to create more housing near local shopping centres and create more housing where we desperately need more housing in Canberra but also allows for an expanded shopping centre precinct that gives more opportunities to residents. We know that having housing closer to shops increases the viability of our shops.

Further, the amendments call on the government to investigate tougher measures for property owners who leave their shop spaces vacant or unused and to review the process for issuing and renewing crown leases. I am also calling on the government to review planning controls around the centre, including opportunities to encourage mixed-use development, such as the housing I have just mentioned. All these amendments together will incentivise local shop owners to consider the wishes of their community and provide services to the suburb of Richardson in that precinct.

I thank everyone who has spoken and is going to speak on the issue and everyone who has been advocating to get Richardson shops back. Last year, I really enjoyed knocking on doors and asking people what they would like to see on the site, from new shops to a good cafe next to the playground so parents can sit and watch their kids. I met many parents who on weekend mornings bundle their kids into the car to go to a playground nearby that has a coffee shop where they could sit and drink their coffee rather than just walking to the Richardson shops and going to that playground. They all commented on how much easier their life would be if they could just walk out their door, go to the playground and have coffee there, rather than having to bundle their kids into the car.

Residents would like to see something like a pharmacy, such as we have at the Gowrie shops and Isabella Plains shops, which are both quite small community shopping centres but have vibrant life because of the pharmacies located onsite. My absolute favourite suggestion from a member of the Richardson community was to have a Spotlight store. One resident, an avid sewer who lives walking distance from the Richardson shops, made a really good case to me why we should have a Spotlight store on the south side and how it would definitely improve her quality of life. Another resident told me about how, when cooking dinner and realising he had run out of something, he could walk to the shops across the oval and back again quicker than it would take him to drive to another centre and park the car. These little things really make a difference in people's lives.

I have countless stories about residents being able to pay for groceries on a tab when they might not have been able to afford something that week but the owner of the supermarket knew who they were and said, "It's fine. Fix me up next time," and even home deliveries for residents who could not collect them themselves, whether that is because they were elderly and mobility impaired or they were sick that week, could not get out of the house and had no-one else to get their groceries. Losing these things has really changed the community.

In Canberra, we pride ourselves on having local shops. Even in areas where we have larger centres, the local shops are such an important part of our suburbs. In other areas of Canberra, we have seen local shops that were empty having a second chance at life, such as in Aranda, but we have also seen instances where they stay empty until they are bulldozed and never replaced. I want to see an outcome where Richardson shops take the path that Aranda shops have taken and not the path of countless others that have existed and then disappeared forever.

I thank Mr Steel for responding to my original petition last year, expressing support then and expressing support now, and the work his office has done with me on these amendments. Sometimes you need to take the approach of looking at the carrot and sometimes you need to look at the stick. I believe my amendments find a balance between the two. While I hope the planning changes and the release of the blocks is a positive way of incentivising investment in the area, I note that, under the current commercial zones policy, there is quite a list of permissible use for the land. I think this is a good opportunity to investigate what stick options might be needed for the vacant shops, because, without an investigation, how will we know what policy levers to use to ensure a positive outcome for Richardson shops or any other shops that find themselves in the same situation in the future? This week, thanks to Minister Cheyne, I have enjoyed reading a copy of the Richardson shops' crown lease and seeing the conditions it was granted under and its obligations. It was a good read. I look forward to the government using that in their investigations to find out what we can do at Richardson.

In closing, I would also like to thank Miss Nuttall for her work on community engagement on this issue, as well as Mr Parton, Ms Morris and Mr Werner-Gibbings for supporting things to happen at Richardson shops in the future. It is wonderful to see members in our electorate from across the political spectrum come together to fight for our local community. I reflect that Brindabella has quite a lot of items on the notice paper this week. As a member for Brindabella, it is great to see how much love Brindabella is getting from the five of us.

I remain confident that a resolution that all parties involved support, including the people of Richardson, can be found. I once again thank residents of Tuggeranong and Richardson for all their support. Since I have been elected, I have had so many emails from people asking, "Is there any update on Richardson shops yet? When will I have shops?" I talk to people about it constantly. At Chisholm the other week, a man who is fairly new to the area came to me saying, "I live across the road from Richardson shops. What's going on?" It is always a talking point. People are always bringing it up with me. I am hopeful that very soon we will see a resolution and, once again, we can enjoy local shops on Clift Crescent.

**MS CHEYNE** (Ginninderra—Manager of Government Business, Attorney-General, Minister for Human Rights, Minister for City and Government Services and Minister for the Night-Time Economy) (3.34): I rise to speak in Minister Steel's absence. He has something important to attend to, so I will speak on his behalf and, as usual, I will probably add my two cents worth as well. I put on the record that I certainly appreciate Miss Nuttall putting this on the notice paper and bringing it on for debate today. There is furious agreement about what everyone is trying to achieve. There are perhaps just a few different ways of expressing how it can be achieved. I think it would be helpful to put on the record some of the facts and the advice that we have to date.

The Richardson shops are privately owned. The site use is governed by a crown lease which commenced in 1982 and expires in 2082. Earlier today I paid to download it and read it because sometimes that is very useful to guide where to go next. The lease permits use of the site for retail and/or personal services.

In relation to compliance obligations in a crown lease, it is worth reminding members in this place that anyone can complain about whether they believe a leaseholder is in breach of their obligations under the lease and that a regulatory process is undertaken. Any decisions, processes or investigations, or indeed enforcement or controlled activity undertakings or orders, are all undertaken by the independent statutory office holder. Access Canberra has provided advice that they have received just one complaint. That was in September 2022 and related to vandalism. The lessee at the time was reminded of their obligations to secure and maintain the premises. No further complaints have been received. The site is currently considered to meet lease and planning obligations. The regulator and the statutory office holder believe that the leaseholder is not in breach.

I acknowledge the existence of schedule 4 of the Planning Act. That includes failing to use land for a continuous period of at least one year. There are powers provided through that schedule, but the powers are provided to an independent office holder, not to someone who is working at the direction of the minister. So, just like a minister cannot direct an independent office holder, nor can the Legislative Assembly, particularly not through a motion. But I would stress again that complaints can be made by anyone, even anonymously, and they will be received and actioned appropriately.

While the site appears underutilised, there is no legislative mechanism to compel activation or development within a defined timeframe, and nor is the ACT government in a position to mandate or apply a timeframe requiring the lessee of the Richardson Shops to secure a tenant. There are many reasons why the owner of a commercial premise may not be using a block for its intended purpose.

I think the heart of Ms Tough's amendments go to us needing to all work together. Reflecting on some of Mr Parton's comments, while having a range of methods to encourage and/or enforce obligations or requirements is certainly worth doing, we also want to make sure that we are not punishing unnecessarily. There can be changes in an owner's personal circumstances, shifts in the broader economic environment or, as Mr Parton was suggesting, low demand for commercial space.

While the government cannot direct commercial leasing arrangements, we certainly are committed to supporting revitalisation through appropriate planning measures, land

release investigations and policy reform. Again, Ms Tough's amendments go to these issues.

Reviewing provisions relating to non-compliance if a lease includes a building and development provision, requiring works to be completed within a stated time and looking at the process for issuing and renewing crown leases and the suitability of the purpose obligation and withdrawal clauses can all certainly be explored. I expect, though, that we will find that the existing powers available are sufficient, but that does not mean we should not have a closer look to ensure that they operating as intended.

Ultimately, though, what we want is for Richardson Shops to be revitalised, ideally with a tenant or tenants that encourage regular visitation—things like bakeries, newsagents, supermarkets or a bottle-o. I am not sure about a Spotlight store, but I do know that there are a lot of crafters and makers all through Canberra, particularly in the south. Ms Tough knows her constituency better than me.

With regard to Aranda shops, this year marks 10 years since Aranda shops had its suburban makeover and sprung back to life. That was a remarkable process. It was something that I was involved in before I was a member in this place, as chair of the Belconnen Community Council and then as a candidate. It is worth reflecting that Aranda shops also sat vacant for a very, very long time and it was very frustrating for residents. One of the best things that occurred was that the owner of the site was able to attract a tenant. The tenant and the owner were able to work with the community to really build up support for what they were going to do there. Ultimately, Aranda has created essentially something that continues to fulfil the wishes of the community. Because of that, the community rewards the intent of the tenant. That is exactly why it is so successful. It is extremely well attended. It might be opportune for the owners of Richardson shops to speak with Mr Dennis, who is still very much involved in the running of one of the major tenancies at Aranda shops.

I note that the ACT government can assist in actively exploring ways to encourage broader activation of the Richardson centre. That is as part of our broader commitment to investigate mechanisms to address long-term commercial vacancies across Canberra and encourage vitalisation by the private sector. There are investigations underway into the adjacent sites north of the Richardson shops site—blocks 15 to 17 of section 454—including financial feasibility assessments and exploring options for housing, community facilities and improved open space. These blocks are, as Ms Tough noted, currently unleased and undeveloped. The investigations will inform recommendations to government to consider the inclusion of these sites in future land release programs. The government is using the levers that it can to drive private investment. I certainly think that is very appropriate in this situation.

I thank Miss Nuttall for what she has brought forward today and for putting on the record some facts and history relating to the site. I certainly support the content of Ms Tough's amendments and commend them to the chamber.

**MS MORRIS** (Brindabella) (3.43): I seek leave to circulate the amendments in my name to Ms Tough's amendments to Miss Nuttall's motion.

Leave granted.

**MS MORRIS:** I move:

1. Omit paragraph (3)(d)(ii).
2. After paragraph (3)(g), insert:
  - “(h) review the cumulative effect of the large range of government charges and compliance on the viability of suburban businesses;
  - (i) acknowledge the effect of the Lease Variation Charge on any attempt to maximise the commercial viability of suburban shops by diversifying their use.”.

I welcome Miss Nuttall’s community engagement on this issue that has brought about this motion today, which calls on the government and the owners of Richardson shops to proactively seek a solution to the dilapidated centre to get the best outcome for the Richardson community. We all know that the Richardson shops are in a very sorry state. No tenants have inhabited the shopping strip in years, while the location has largely been vacant since IGA left in 2019. It is an eyesore. It is attracting antisocial behaviour and the people of Richardson do deserve so much better than that.

Fixing up Richardson Shopping Centre has been a multi-partisan commitment. Former Liberal member for Brindabella, Nicole Lawder, developed a community petition so locals could have their say and call for better facilities; and last year, Labor’s former and future Brindabella members, Ms Burch and Ms Tough, were also involved in a petition. Now with Miss Nuttall’s community survey and with her motion, it is clear that the issue itself is not a political or ideological one. It is simply a local community issue that desperately needs to be resolved. I think we are all in agreement on that, so I welcome the intentions of your motion today.

For too long, Tuggeranong has been neglected. Our communities deserve so much better than what they are receiving. We are certainly paying for better than what we are getting through increases to our rates, and I am willing to bet that, in true Labor tradition, there will be another increase to Tuggeranong families’ rates bills in the budget that will be handed down by the Treasurer tonight, but we shall wait and see.

In addressing this motion, it is important to understand the history of this site since the IGA and other tenants have left. The leaseholders of the shopping strip have confirmed that at multiple points since 2022 they have actively sought to put new tenants in the Richardson shops. However, a series of Labor government roadblocks have prevented this from being successful. Efforts by the leaseholder to introduce service centres, mechanics or a childcare centre to the shops were denied.

After preventing certain businesses from inhabiting the strip, the government responded to the current vacancies by saying last year that their taxation of leaseholders through property taxes will solve the issue. Really? Is that the government’s solution? Put up roadblocks to prevent tenants from moving in and then claim it will sort itself out because leaseholders will be punished with tougher measures through property taxes? It is exactly this sort of mentality that makes Canberra one of the most difficult jurisdictions in Australia for businesses to survive. We have the lowest four-year business survival rate in Australia.

According to Greg Harford, the Chief Executive Officer of the Canberra Business Chamber, businesses are feeling “gloomy” because of the operating environment created by the ACT government, and that 40 per cent of the chamber’s members were not expecting to make a profit this year.

Just think about the flow-on effect of that; the impact of that on local families who rely on local businesses for jobs and services, which is what we are asking today. Mr Harford said:

My concern is that every time the government puts up taxes on the business sector, that is a disincentive to do business in the ACT ... The impact of government fees, taxes, rates and other levies [are] absolutely huge, and it can make the difference between a business being viable or otherwise.

I think we need to pay attention to those words, and Richardson shops is a classic example of what happens under an anti-business agenda. In 2022, Ms Lawder’s petition called on the government to better incentivise potential business owners to occupy shopfronts at suburban shops, like Richardson shops. After this petition received over 500 signatures, how do you think the government responded? By investigating policies and plans to attract and support government businesses to keep our local shops healthy and vibrant? Sadly not. The government agreed to contact the leaseholders to:

... remind them of their obligations to maintain the leasehold, including keeping it in a clean state ...

So let us just summarise all that. Let us get the history straight. The government told the leaseholders they needed to find new tenants. The leaseholders found multiple prospective tenants, but the government said no and ruled them out. A community petition called for better incentives to encourage business owners to move to the suburbs. This government said, “Thank you, but no thank you.” The government then threatens the leaseholders with additional taxes to penalise businesses in some bizarre attempt to attract business to the area.

With this record, I am shocked, truly shocked, that local businesses are cautious of setting up shop here in Canberra, because it is not just Richardson shops where we are seeing issues like this persist, which has already been canvassed by members in this place today. This is how the ACT government has operated for years, with blatant disregard for business owners and with unclear, muddled communication towards leaseholders and developers. We are seeing it also with the long-mooted ice rink for Tuggeranong, which is currently underway.

The Richardson shops are in very poor condition and any local can tell you that. Every local wants to see a swift resolution to the saga. It brings me no pleasure to point out that this government is complicit in the current mess we see. I want to see Richardson shops revitalised and thriving for our local community to benefit from. I want to see coffee shops, hairdressers, grocers, local businesses—you name it—return to Richardson and invest in our suburbs, but I fear that the dereliction of Richardson shops will persist for as long as the government refuses to acknowledge or take any responsibility for their part in this. You cannot just wash your hands clean.

I commend Miss Nuttall's intentions. I must stress that the heart of the problem, and therefore the heart of the solution, must go to the government's role in this. So for that reason, I have brought forward these amendments today that seek to strengthen the motion. We are not looking to remove much; it is just to insert some provisions that acknowledge some of the levers the government can pull here. We acknowledge that leaseholders do have a responsibility, but we cannot forget that they can operate only within the confines of government laws, regulations, taxes and red tape. So thank you, Miss Nuttall, for bringing this forward and for your engagement on the motion and on these amendments; and thank you, Ms Tough, as well, for your engagement, too.

But again I would say—hopefully in the final few minutes of this debate you might change your minds and support our amendments—the heart of these amendments goes to addressing what the government can actually do and that is why it strengthens this motion today. So what we are seeking to do is get an acknowledgement from the government of the effect of the Lease Variation Charge, which my colleague Mr Parton spoke about previously, on any attempt for leaseholders to maximise the commercial viability of shops by diversifying their use. We are also seeking a review of the cumulative effect of a large range of government charges, taxes, fees—you name it—and compliance on the viability of local businesses. Thank you very much and I commend my amendments to the Assembly.

**MR WERNER-GIBBINGS** (Brindabella) (3.53): I rise to speak very briefly in this important conversation about our local shops. I also support Ms Tough's proposed amendments to Miss Nuttall's motion, not just because it is about Richardson but because it is also about a bigger conversation—a conversation about the future of Tuggeranong's local suburban shops. I thank Miss Nuttall for bringing that larger conversation to the Assembly by moving this motion. I also thank Ms Tough for the extensive work that I know she has been doing over the past 18 to 24 months. I also thank Mr Parton and Ms Morris for their contributions about this issue, because local shops matter to communities.

They are not just places to grab a coffee, a loaf of bread or a last-minute, 6.59 pm dash to get the eggs and the ripe avocados that the supermarkets do not have. They are where we bump into neighbours. They are where small businesses can take root. They are where community happens. They are part of the daily rhythm of life in Tuggeranong.

When I first ran to represent Tuggeranong in 2016, Richardson and Monash had that rhythm. Those shops were brilliant places to pause and charge up when I was doing long, solo Sunday doorknocks in those two lovely suburbs. But in 2025, those rhythms have gone from both suburbs.

The Richardson shops started struggling in 2019. The last tenant left in 2022. It is now effectively derelict and has been for some time—too long. Despite two petitions, one in 2022, and another in 2024 by my colleague Ms Tough, nothing has changed. It is not just disappointing; it is unacceptable. The site in Richardson has received government investment. The Monash shops host a vet and, like Richardson, have recently received upgrades to their public spaces from the ACT government. But businesses have not yet followed the government's investments.

I thank Miss Nuttall for her work surveying the community about what people in and



around Richardson want from that site. Her survey found that 95 per cent of people want the site redeveloped. That is overwhelming support, and the top preference is for commercial use. People want their shops back. They want a place to gather, to shop, to connect. We know that suburban shops can thrive in Tuggeranong. It has been got right at Gordon, Isabella Plains and Gowrie. Those local suburban hubs are humming, and especially on weekends. The rhythms are there every day.

This motion calls for action. It asks the government to negotiate with the owner, to investigate why this site was left empty for so long and to consider policy changes. But I echo Mr Parton here: penalising owners does not fix the issue. Part of the problem is commercial viability. If there is no foot traffic to a local suburban centre, there is no business. That is why we need to look beyond the shopfronts.

Just next door, in section 454 blocks 15, 16 and 17, there are three small parcels of land zoned CZ4. They are not big, but they are full of potential. With the right investment, they could become multi-unit housing, and there may be other blocks nearby, or at other local shops, where similar actions could be taken. That means more people living locally, more people living close to their local shops, more customers walking past and more life in the area. These are steps that would work to make sure that something like what happened at Richardson and Monash will not happen again. In fact, they could bring Monash and Richardson back.

I say to the owners of the Richardson site: you must be aware by now that the community is ready to work with you, and that the government is also ready to work with you. The time for waiting is over. It is time to engage, to listen and to act in the best interests of the community, because every suburb deserves a local centre that reflects the pride that people have in where they live.

**MS CARRICK** (Murrumbidgee) (3.57): I rise to express my support for the motion to investigate what can be done about utilising Richardson shops. Local centres are an important part of shaping and building the community. It involves more than being punitive about leaving shops empty. It is important to shine a light on the issues surrounding the viability of commercial spaces, as Mr Parton and Mr Werner-Gibblings said. It is important to be positive and to look at the planning for these local shops. Many of them are thriving, but many of them across Canberra are not thriving. I can name local shops across Woden and Weston Creek that also are not thriving.

We need to look at our different demographics. What attracts people to our local shops—our young people, our mothers with families, with young children, and older people? What makes our local shops a destination and attracts different types of people? We need to look at playgrounds being located near the cafes, where parents can sit and chat with their mates, knowing that the kids are playing within eyesight. There are many things that can be looked at—barbecues, half basketball courts. A range of things can be done to create a destination for locals so that they can meet, play and be together.

This really is a case of looking at these local shops and at how they can be better planned to attract people to come and meet each other.

**MS CLAY** (Ginninderra) (3.59): I will be brief. There have been a lot of speakers today. Richo shops is clearly something that calls to a lot of members here. I am glad

that Miss Nuttall has brought this forward and to see the work of so many members on this issue. It is good that she has brought forward both the specific issue for Richo shops and some great solutions that are likely to get a good community outcome there, while also referring to the systemic problem that has been going on.

A lot of Canberrans are really tired of seeing land-banking and shop-squatting. I will mention a couple of specific examples that came up this term and last term. The Giralang shops were vacant for over 15 years, and we had a developer there who kept saying that, for various commercial reasons, it just was not possible. It was not possible, it could not be done and it could not be developed. I chaired a committee inquiry into that. We got a lot of evidence. Mostly, the community just wanted something there. That is what the community always wants—something to be there. With a little bit of attention, and a bit more government attention, that developer decided to hand it on.

Within six months of that developer saying it was not possible to have a supermarket there and that it was not possible to redevelop there, the new developer had arranged everything. Within two years, it was complete. It is clearly an art and a business to develop and run shops. Also, people in Canberra are tired of seeing vacant sites left there for such long periods of time, and they want quicker action.

Big Splash, I am pleased to say, has not been such a lengthy one. This became vacant only late last year, and it looks like we are seeing much quicker action there. We are probably in a phase now where Canberrans do expect better. They do not expect things to be sitting empty for five, six, 10, 15 or 20 years. Our community is growing and there are a lot of things that we need. It is really good to see both the specific attention and that we will get a really good outcome, I hope, with Richo shops—it looks like there are so many great ideas—and some more systemic changes and a bit more proactive enforcement and attention regarding the planning and lease levers that we have to make sure that these issues do not drag on for so long.

**MR ASSISTANT SPEAKER** (Mr Cain): The question is that Ms Morris's amendments to Ms Tough's amendments to Miss Nuttall's motion be agreed to.

Question put:

That amendments to amendments be agreed to.

The Assembly voted—

Ayes 9

Noes 11

Chiaka Barry	Elizabeth Lee	Andrew Barr	Marisa Paterson
Peter Cain	Deborah Morris	Yvette Berry	Shane Rattenbury
Fiona Carrick	Mark Parton	Tara Cheyne	Rachel Stephen-Smith
Leanne Castley		Jo Clay	Caitlin Tough
Thomas Emerson		Laura Nuttall	Taimus Werner-Gibblings
Jeremy Hanson		Suzanne Orr	

Question resolved in the negative.

**Ms Morris's** amendment to **Ms Tough's** proposed amendment negatived.

**Ms Tough's** amendments to **Miss Nuttall's** motion agreed to.

**MISS NUTTALL** (Brindabella) (4.07): In closing, I am grateful to all members who have engaged today: Mr Parton, Ms Tough, Ms Cheyne, Ms Morris, Mr Werner-Gibbings, Ms Carrick and Ms Clay. I would like to give a particular shout-out to Ms Tough for her previous work, her constructive interest and amendments. And I do hope to pick up where I left off, because I am very grateful that she moved her amendments; I think they improve the motion and the outcomes we would expect to see for the community. I am also hugely relieved she did, because we were running out of words with the word count, and she added some valuable points.

In the “calls”, I am glad she has pointed out how broad the current zoning of “local centre zone” is. In fact, it is broad enough that it could do just about everything the community currently wants it to do. Shop-top housing? Done. Medical centre? Sure. Cafe and shops? Easy. Heck, I wonder if a five-member electorate office might fit in! And I appreciate that this is pre-lease variation charge but with a fair valuation of the site before and after, as this kind of zoning is conducive to community aspirations and about as viable as it could get for commercial land. Zoning is not the problem, which is great; that is one problem solved.

I also like Ms Tough's call for a review of the planning controls with mixed-use residential land, or shop-top, in mind. Thanks to my Greens colleague Ms Clay's work to get the government to set an urban growth boundary, we need to be very strategic about how we make the best use of space and provide for enough housing for everyone in the ACT. Releasing the undeveloped blocks on the site may well see a future where the Richardson shops become a bigger precinct. Some people have pitched to me that it might make the precinct more commercially viable; we have certainly heard that here. What I am looking for—what I think we should all be looking for—is the scenario that most benefits the Richardson community and meets their needs, so if we are able to draw more utility out of the site, then that is brilliant.

Finally, I like the addition of changing the terms of the crown lease on community-centre zoned blocks to provide for the lease to be sold where they have been vacant for more than three years. If government is entrusting landholders with community-zoned land, they need to be able to ensure the land actually benefits the community.

Regarding Ms Morris's amendments, I really appreciate her interest in the additional calls, but they depart substantially from the calls of our motion and the responsibility that community places on government and owners to find a good resolution. Her proposal to review the cumulative effect of government charges and compliance is, I fear, a bit too broad, and I worry it would have detracted from the intent of the motion which, at its core, is about fixing Richardson shops, in particular. By drawing attention to the lease variation charge in particular, I also worry that we would be pre-empting the discussion we are asking government to have with the owners.

Now to a couple of points that people brought up in debate, and I think it is a shame that Mr Parton has left the chamber and will not be able to hear my zingers in response! I think he mentioned that there was maybe an intent to gouge. I think disincentivising a commercial leaseholder from keeping something vacant is fairly different to gouging,

and the intent of this motion is to disincentivise people from keeping lands vacant that could be used to the benefit of a community.

When he said that we had to have a full solution in place by December, that is not our intention. What we want is to lock-in some kind of action by December—so to get that negotiation ball rolling by December. I understand that it takes time to find a viable tenant, especially if the shop needs a little bit of a fix-up, which I suspect that it will, given all the smashed windows. But the community does need answers, so we wanted to do something by the end of the year that would allow us to check-in and see whether the government is meeting its obligations to the community.

I am also concerned when Mr Parton talks about the idea of private interest. Does he think that the owners of shopfronts should hold out against community interests if they are not turning as much profit as they would like to? I do not think that is the best outcome for the community, and I think that he should maybe check-in with the Brindabella and Richardson community about that one. And, yes, I would like to live in a socialist utopia! You have heard it here! It is on *Hansard* now!

Because I have still got a couple of minutes, I would really like to get some of the words from Richardson residents on *Hansard*, because these are the voices that we actually do need to keep at the centre of our debate. And I do present this uncritically. They go in a lot of different directions, and some people in this place might agree with some of them, and others in this place might agree with some others. Here we go:

3. (1) It would be an essential place for community to come together to connect, to network and to access essential groceries on their doorstep.
- (2) Richardson shops as a kid was a treat. You got to walk there after school with your mates, use your coins and see what lollies you could buy to share. I think having something that brings the kids together but also brings the community back together!
- (3) It's a great little local spot. It's lost its sparkle and needs help attracting people back to the area. Please help it find its sparkle again. Oh to be a buzzing little community hotspot again!
- (4) It creates a dead central hub around the amazing primary school. Bring life and business back to our suburban shops.
- (5) Current action isn't good enough and more should be done to support local business owners.
- (6) It's worth saving, and please hear what people have to say.
- (7) Make the area more inviting to the community instead of inviting vandalism as it does now.
- (8) The shops have been derelict for too long. Feels like the government doesn't care about it. It actually feels like the government really doesn't really care about Tuggeranong. Nothing for us in the budget—run down parks, damaged footpaths, graffiti everywhere, and shops an eyesore.
- (9) I have lived in Richardson since 1982, and things have declined significantly in that time.
- (10) The suburb feels disadvantaged from the state of these shops. It makes the suburb look derelict and it's due to the landlords' incompetence. The shops

previously had lots of support from the community.

(11) Something needs to be done.

(12) Anything.

That is quite a diversity of views, and I think it is important to get that diversity on the record. But they all do have one thing in common, right? They want the Richardson shops fixed, and I think from the debate we have heard that everyone here wants the Richardson shops fixed, despite our differences in opinion on how to get there.

So let's recap: at the end of the day, we are all here to represent the community, and the community has lost out on a local community centre and access to the basics for years. Richardson locals have made their frustrations loud and clear, and, even more importantly, they have told us what they actually want on the site. It is now on government and owners to work together to meet community need and expectation. And until they do that, please, be rest assured that I will be an absolute pain in the neck! Expect lines of questioning, letters, posters, socials and, occasionally, barbeques; that is a threat! I have a banner now. It is three metres long. I painted it myself. I am not afraid to use it!

As a long-time former resident, this topic is deeply personal to me and, after hearing how much the Richardson shops mean to the community, there is no way I am going to let this issue rest until we have something on the site that community wants and needs. I am sure I am not the only one here feeling like that, so let's fix the shops. Thank you.

Original question, as amended, resolved in the affirmative.

## **Health care—access to specialists**

**MS CASTLEY** (Yerrabi—Leader of the Opposition) (4.15): Together with Mr Rattenbury, I move:

That this Assembly:

(1) notes that:

- (a) growing concerns from clinicians and patients about excessive elective surgery waiting lists, the lack of access to data on wait times for specialist procedures and appointments, delayed access to urgent care and reports of interference in clinical decision making; and
- (b) the only available data for wait times for specialist appointments for 2022-2023 shows that clinical time frames are not being met. The average patient in either category one, category two, or category three was not seen in a clinically indicated time frame for the following craft groups:
  - (i) ear, nose and throat;
  - (ii) general surgery;
  - (iii) neurosurgery;
  - (iv) ophthalmology;
  - (v) plastic surgery;

- (vi) vascular surgery;
  - (vii) dermatology;
  - (viii) endocrinology;
  - (ix) gastroenterology;
  - (x) paediatrics;
  - (xi) respiratory and sleep;
  - (xii) gynaecology; and
  - (xiii) rheumatology;
- (2) acknowledges the dedication of frontline clinicians, allied health professionals, and support staff who continue to deliver high-quality care despite systemic pressures;
- (3) calls on the Government to establish, within three months, an independent inquiry into identifying relevant health data and processes that would allow Canberrans, clinicians and policy makers to be best informed about the functionality of the ACT health system. The inquiry should:
- (a) be led by a suitably qualified chair with no current, recent past employment, or contractual relationship with ACT public hospitals, and has an understanding of the particular characteristics of a health system like the ACT, including the role of the Canberra Hospital as a teaching hospital;
  - (b) investigate:
    - (i) required improvements to the health data currently made publicly available including, but not limited to, wait times for specialist appointments;
    - (ii) inter-jurisdictional comparisons of publicly available health data;
    - (iii) centralising the publication of health data;
    - (iv) required improvements in the presentation of data to demonstrate longitudinal comparison, changes, and segmentation to demonstrate determinants;
    - (v) the extent and impact of any interference—administrative, managerial, or political—in clinical care decisions;
    - (vi) current and projected resourcing needs (workforce, theatres, equipment, and beds) relative to demand;
    - (vii) drivers of waiting-list growth, including referral pathways and peri-operative capacity constraints;
    - (viii) inter-jurisdictional comparisons of drivers of waiting-list growth, including referral pathways and peri-operative capacity constraints;
    - (ix) factors affecting recruitment, retention, and morale of medical, nursing, and allied health staff;
    - (x) the effectiveness, risks, and unintended consequences of the planned care reforms and the Digital Health Record implementation, including potential improvements in data, updates to privacy legislation, and oversight required to facilitate patients' treatment; and

- (xi) concerns raised in this debate about cardiology and orthopaedic surgery groups in the ACT public health system;
  - (c) undertake confidential stakeholder consultations, accept written submissions, and publish hearing transcripts (subject to privacy concerns);
  - (d) make evidence-based recommendations to improve governance, resourcing, data required to facilitate patient, policy and clinical outcomes, and staff wellbeing; and
  - (e) make its report publicly available, including by the Minister for Health tabling the final report in the Assembly by 30 June 2026; and
- (4) calls on the Minister to table a formal response to the report by the last sitting day of 2026.

I rise today to move this joint motion that will allow us to have a strong and transparent inquiry into our elective surgery processes, as well as a deep dive into what is happening in cardiology and orthopaedic surgery. At the outset, I would like to thank the leader of the Greens, Mr Rattenbury, and his staff, for his continued dialogue regarding this issue and the state of ACT Health and our health system.

I know that, like me, he has been contacted by many, many health professionals and staff who are worried about the state of treatment that Canberrans are receiving. It is not often that the Liberals and the Greens agree on something wholeheartedly, but when it comes to the state of our health system, we do. All the feedback and evidence that I know we both have heard means something is wrong, and we must act. The motion to establish this independent inquiry will allow us to get to the problems that the minister denies having.

I note that the ACT Labor government have read the tea leaves and will not be opposing the motion to set up this independent inquiry, and we welcome that and merely wish to comment that the motion to establish this independent inquiry was going to be passed by the Assembly anyway. However, their actions will not prevent me from explaining exactly why we have moved this motion today.

An independent inquiry will allow Canberrans to understand that, despite the minister's claims, the waiting times and processes for getting professional treatment are getting worse and not better. It may sound like a niche issue to some. It may sound like we are chasing rabbits down a hole. But I cannot stress this more strongly: we must get to the bottom of this so we can understand the true state of the elective surgery processes.

This minister has been responsible for health now for six years, a time characterised by falling bulk-billing rates in the ACT and by increasing costs to see a GP—that is, Canberrans now have less of a chance of seeing a bulk-billing GP under this minister, and it also now costs them more. For the past six years, we have seen excuses, and excuses, and some more excuses from the Minister for Health. If we were to believe her, there is nothing wrong with the ACT health and hospital system. Indeed, we should not be asking questions about it because, according to the minister, how dare Canberrans question her judgement! Unfortunately, this is not an episode of *Play School*! The reality is that this minister has overseen and been responsible for some of the worst health results in the nation.

I know that statistics can be manipulated; they can be changed to suit the author, but what this motion is about today is one thing—that is, patient care. There is nothing more important than patient care. Receiving treatment, getting healthy and getting back on your feet again is the perfect outcome. Being treated by health professionals and getting the best advice and treatment is the goal of the ACT health system. Minister, it is not about fudging figures to make the statistics look good.

Since I became shadow health minister, I have set myself the goal of listening to the concerns of patients and health professionals. I have spent numerous hours listening to the problems, about how things could be better and how medical staff are not being listened to. I know and understand their frustration. I have heard them. This motion today represents what they have been asking for.

Mr Assistant Speaker, as I said earlier, numbers and systems can be fudged and manipulated, particularly if you have been in government for 23 years, particularly if you have an ambitious minister looking to get ahead. But Canberrans deserve the truth about their health system.

Every fortnight Canberra Health Services publishes elective surgery waitlist data. It is a report. In the report they categorise the number of people on the elective surgery waitlist, the number of those people who are overdue for surgery, and those who are not quite ready for treatment. The public might think, “Great, this is a good thing. They are being transparent about their performance.” However, Canberrans should not get too excited. Despite elective surgery waitlists being of incredible importance to thousands of Canberrans, the Minister for Health is far less interested in transparency and more focused on spin.

For those that do not know, this elective surgery waitlist data is not publicised. It is updated every fortnight, but no-one is notified as to when it is updated. And only the previous fortnight’s data is kept public. That’s right: the public can only see the previous fortnight’s performance. You cannot easily track the performance over time. They will not allow Canberrans the information to see how their waitlist for elective surgery is performing. So because the minister will not tell you, I will.

Since the last election, the percentage of people waiting longer than the clinically recommended time for elective surgery has gone up. Yes, I believe it. Canberrans need to understand that overdue waitlist times have gone up since Labor were elected in October last year. Across all three priority categories, the percentage of Canberrans waiting longer than the recommended time for elective surgery has risen from 28 to 29 per cent. But, scarily, the percentage of people who have been waiting for over 12 months for elective surgery has gone from 22 per cent in October 2024 to 26 per cent as of 19 June 2025. So the proportion of Canberrans waiting longer than a year for elective surgery has gone through the roof, but there is no way you would hear that from the minister.

Mr Assistant Speaker, because of the secrecy and because of the lack of transparency, and, most importantly, because of the lack of focus on patient care, we are forced to move this motion to establish an independent inquiry. I know Mr Rattenbury has heard this, but the number of medical professionals that have come to us in confidence,



frustrated and concerned about the system they work in, is incredible. They are worried that patient care is being compromised. They are concerned that because of the system and processes this minister has introduced, Canberrans are not being treated properly. They are forced, most days, to make decisions they do not want to by a system that is designed to improve statistics, not patient care. These highly skilled medical professionals are concerned about a system that forces them to put processes and numbers above the proper treatment of patients, and they are afraid of speaking up. Shame!

This motion is incredibly important. The health budget is the biggest spender of taxpayer dollars by far, and Canberrans deserve to know how well it is travelling. As I have briefly covered, there are a number of reasons for this motion, but I want to impress upon the Assembly how important it is that we have an independent inquiry. There have been numerous internal inquiries and reports, and things come out that the government have initiated; however, they are not fixing employee culture or patient outcomes. The two big reasons for the independent inquiry today are, as I have just outlined: (1) it is time to get to the bottom of how our elective surgery is managed in the ACT and how the processes and rubbery figures have become more important than patient care; and (2) the events over recent times with orthopaedic surgeons and, in recent years, the cardiology department.

I want to thank the many, many surgeons, and the other medical specialists and professionals who have contacted my office to talk about these important issues; they have given me hours. They have repeatedly said that without an independent inquiry the system will not get any better, and patients will remain a lower priority, and that is not what they want. It must be independent. The Canberra Liberals have, for many years now, sought a royal commission, and we are not going to give up on that. It is not something we will let go of.

We hear from so many specialists, so many nurses and doctors, in the health system who believe that it is not just orthopaedic surgery, it is not just cardiology, it is system wide. Today I am thrilled that we have been able to come to an agreement and get this inquiry into cardiology and orthopaedic surgery. You cannot have almost half of your team resign without sitting back and taking a good look at what is going on and what their concerns are—what concerns they are raising with regard to patient decisions. As I mentioned, a couple of years ago, a number of cardiologists wrote a scathing open letter and had to go to the media about it because they were not getting anywhere internally.

It is time to shine a light on the system and to make sure people are treated properly. After 23 years of one tired and stale Labor government, Canberrans do deserve better. Again, I want thank the Greens for co-authoring the motion and all of the staff who have worked on this one. I commend the motion to the Assembly.

**MR RATTENBURY** (Kurrajong) (4.25): I rise today to speak to the joint motion circulated in Ms Castley's name and my name. I would like to start by thanking Ms Castley and her office for working with us on this joint motion. I am pleased that we have been able to collaborate on the motion, which I believe will allow us to move further towards fully understanding issues in Canberra's healthcare system. The motion calls on the government to establish an independent inquiry into identifying relevant

health data and processes that would allow Canberrans, clinicians and policymakers to be best informed about the functionality of the ACT health system.

Throughout this term, I have been increasingly concerned about the increase in demands on acute healthcare services. Firstly, we have seen the pressure on acute emergency services grow significantly. We know that, between July and December 2024, emergency department presentations increased by 7.6 per cent, while overnight hospital admissions grew by 8.8 per cent. This is a much larger increase than any other jurisdiction in Australia. As the Greens have spoken with stakeholders and discussed both the drivers and the implications of this increasing demand and pressure, it is evident that there are a number of areas of concern and for potential improvement in our healthcare system.

Ms Castley has also been having those conversations, and, from the analysis and perspectives that we have garnered through our respective conversations, we have worked together to develop this motion, which seeks to explore the most pressing issues and areas that we believe can best inform the basis for improved understanding and performance in our healthcare system. We have sought to develop an inquiry that can deliver recommendations that will result in real improvement in a timely manner.

The inquiry into the Appropriation Bill 2024-2025 (No 2) noted:

The Committee was concerned that the Government was not able to provide sufficient detail on what is driving the trends in demands for health services.

I believe this inquiry will contribute to putting more of the pieces of the puzzle together.

The ACT Greens have been consistently asking questions and talking to the Assembly this year about access to primary and preventative health care. One of the key elements of this is the importance of us having access to data on specialist wait times. Currently the government is talking about wait times only for elective surgery. To even get onto the surgery waiting list, you must first see a specialist. How long is it going to take you to see a specialist? I will take a minute to go through a few examples of people who might be seen on time for elective surgery but whose real experience of the healthcare system is obscured by the amount of time it has taken for them to even get into the door of a specialist.

One example is someone who has a referral to see a specialist in dermatology and was classified as a category 2 patient, which means the clinical guidelines indicate that they should be seen within 90 days. Instead, the average person waits 1,161 days for their first appointment. That is 12.9 times longer than the clinical guidelines. In that time, their condition continues to worsen as they wait so long for care.

Another person has a referral to see a gynaecologist in the public system. They have been classified as a category 3 patient, which means they should be seen within the next 365 days. Instead, the average person waits 1,103 days for their first appointment. In that time, the person is resorted to pursuing their medical care through a private provider. In Canberra, we have the highest out-of-pocket fees for a specialist in the country.

Finally, someone referred to an ear, nose and throat specialist and who should have been seen within 90 days is left waiting, on average, 1,414 days—almost four years. In this time, if they are able to, they save funds, save leave and go to Sydney to seek treatment.

These are not random numbers or examples. The cases of wait times for specialist appointments that I presented are from data that shows how long it took the average person to see a specialist in 2022-23. The average person waits 12.9 times longer than the clinical guidelines for a dermatology appointment and four years for an ENT specialist. Given that is the average, there are people who wait even longer.

We know that these issues have not been resolved. We just do not know what the situation looks like now. However, what I do know is that I consistently hear from constituents who are struggling to afford health care. I hear from constituents who resort to travelling to Sydney or even Melbourne to access health care. I hear that people are waiting many months, if not years, just to get their first appointment with a specialist.

Just this morning, I decided to ask people on social media to share how long it took them to get a specialist appointment in Canberra. I will take a moment to share a few of their stories with you today. Someone shared that they waited 18 months to get their first appointment at the eating disorders clinic. However, they then found that there was no-one to assist them with their specific eating disorder. They had to wait another 18 months for an ADHD diagnosis and autism diagnosis. Rather than wait that time, they paid \$5,000 to seek a private diagnosis.

I will read another comment someone shared. They said:

I am disabled, and struggling financially because of this, and it is costing me thousands a year having to constantly travel up to Sydney and see private specialists due to the lack of healthcare available in the ACT. I needed an urgent colonoscopy and gastro endoscopy, it's been 2 months and Canberra hospital still haven't even so much as uploaded my referral to their system. So my doctor took action and now I have to travel to Sydney for it.

Another constituent, Aden, who has given me permission to share his story, has been waiting 18 months for a respiratory specialist and still has not been seen. Someone else shared that they have been waiting almost two years for a transvaginal ultrasound to look for signs of potential endometriosis or PCOS. Another person has been waiting over two years “for just the appointment to see someone in the public system about a hernia, let alone getting it fixed”. Someone else said, “I am still on the dermatology waiting list and have been there since 2014.” Another comment was: “I am trying to get an MRI in the public system. I was told a few weeks back that they are currently booking nine months out.” Another said, “Eighteen months for an ophthalmologist—public—for unexplained vision loss. Early 30s.” Another said, “Twelve months for an ENT specialist.” And another said, “Four years to see a rheumatologist. After 3½ years, I gave up and used my savings on private.” Another person waiting for a rheumatologist, Liz, who has also given permission for me to share her experience, waited 18 months to see a rheumatologist in Canberra, but, due to the long waits, she travelled to Melbourne to access timely care. Someone else wrote:

My daughter was referred to a paediatrician at 4 months old for potential

developmental concerns, and we got an appointment when she was 2.5 years old. If I had been relying on this care and my daughter had truly needed it, it would have been devastating to wait so long—especially at such a vulnerable stage of life, when timely treatment is integral to lifelong outcomes.

Those are people's experiences that they shared. That is what they are experiencing.

It is essential that we provide the data that provides us with a holistic understanding of what is happening in the health system so that we can better analyse these examples and think about how to improve performance. Nobody in our community should have to pick between buying groceries or going to the doctor or saving to go to a private specialist while their health gets worse or feeling that they need to head interstate because the waiting time in Canberra makes them feel that they will never be treated.

While the Greens have been particularly focused on issues of data in putting this motion together, we know from our conversations with a range of stakeholders and our discussions with Ms Castley that there are other areas of concern in our healthcare system that warrant investigation. It is evident from public discussion and our conversations that the model of planned care is an important area of debate in the ACT health system. I have had the opportunity for a briefing from the government, and I am grateful for that, including Canberra Health staff who joined that conversation.

I acknowledge the potential benefits of the planned care reforms to improve equity of access to care. However, I have also been hearing from several other stakeholders about concerns and improvements that should be made. I believe that the inquiry will allow us to assess these changes and ensure that they will provide the improvements that we wish to see in the healthcare system. As Ms Castley has noted, the areas of cardiology and orthopaedics have been a particular point of focus in public commentary. We share some of these concerns, but we also wish to ensure that we are using this inquiry to understand the full range of experiences in all areas across the healthcare system, rather than focusing on two craft groups.

I wish to thank all of our constituents who allowed me to share their experiences of accessing specialist care in Canberra. It is hoped that this inquiry will provide greater clarity for patients, clinicians and policymakers alike to fully understand the healthcare system. We need a specific plan to understand the data we need, the presentation of data to demonstrate longitudinal trends and the drivers of waiting list growth. This understanding will go a long way towards addressing the government's lack of answers for the current skyrocketing demand for acute services. Perhaps they will find that not being able to afford primary preventative health services or having to wait years for it might be one of the main answers for this.

On that basis, I commend the motion to the Assembly. I particularly look forward to seeing the results of this work. A lot of political discussion takes place in this place. This is an opportunity to have independent commentary on these matters and, potentially, then a pathway to be identified in some of these really important areas of work.

**MS STEPHEN-SMITH** (Kurrajong—Minister for Health, Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Finance and Minister for the Public Service) (4.35): I will start by addressing one of the last comments that Mr Rattenbury made. I am pleased to speak

on this motion today, but I will just remind Mr Rattenbury that I have been saying for years, as have other state and territory health ministers, that lack of access to primary care, lack of access to bulk-billed primary care and lack of access to specialist services are primary drivers of pressure on our state and territory public hospital and health systems. That is why we have been so pleased to see the Albanese Labor government investing significantly in primary care in a way that the previous federal coalition government never did. Mr Rattenbury's ongoing rhetoric around Labor somehow not recognising that this is a challenge is just laughable. I have been talking about the crisis in primary care for years.

In the budget, we are investing, as we have already announced, in both professional development and wellbeing for primary care professionals, and also in providing incentives for general practice, particularly to bulk-bill children and young people. That builds upon the Commonwealth government's investment in primary care to triple the bulk-billing incentive, not just now for children and young people and vulnerable people but also for all bulk-billed appointments. The changes that we are making to GP bulk-billing arrangements will also work to incentivise bulk-billing by exempting any income that is generated from bulk-billed services from the calculation of income eligible for payroll tax.

Mr Rattenbury has also continued to express confusion about the increased demand and the reasons for it across the ACT health system, as though we are alone. I would point Mr Rattenbury to this: we have seen almost every other jurisdiction—if not every one now—release their budgets, and every state and territory, other than New South Wales, has seen growth in health funding for their public hospital and health systems of between 9.4 per cent, which is the lowest, to 14.7 per cent, which is the highest. Ours, at 11.7 per cent, will rank in the middle, in terms of how much we have seen the significant impact on health service demand and costs across our system, which is exactly what we have been saying for months.

To the point of this motion, it is really great to see Ms Castley and Mr Rattenbury once again working collaboratively in this place. I thank Mr Rattenbury for addressing some of the concerns that we held about Ms Castley's original motion, which included some pretty ill-informed and inflammatory statements. I am pleased that the motion we are debating today is not, as Ms Castley indicated, entirely focused on two areas, because the approach that Ms Castley has taken simply further exacerbates the distress that our valued staff experience when they are under the kind of negative spotlight that Ms Castley seeks to shine on them.

In that regard, I note that simply adding some nice words in paragraph 2 of this motion does not negate the detrimental effect of Ms Castley's approach and the imputations that she has been making about various individual clinicians—sometimes without names; sometimes with very clear pointers—in the past sitting weeks. Nevertheless, it is good to see that, on this motion, she is willing to engage with Mr Rattenbury once again. There was a time when a leader of the Canberra Liberals engaging with the Leader of the Greens was enough to see them lose their job, so it is good that Ms Castley is so confident in the support that she has from her own party room that she is willing to reach out to Mr Rattenbury and have those productive conversations. I hope that her confidence is indeed warranted, but it is really nice to see that the Leader of the Opposition and the Leader of the Greens are working so closely together.

I note also that Mr Rattenbury took to Reddit to seek examples of Canberrans' experiences with specialist waiting times in the ACT. He read out some of the examples that were shared with him. Of course, like everyone in this place, it is always really distressing to hear when people have to wait for specialist services, whether it is in outpatients clinics or in elective surgery, whether it is public or private. Unsurprisingly, a lot of the people who responded to Mr Rattenbury's call actually talked about the long waiting times and high cost of accessing private specialists, which perhaps contributes to the challenges we face in our public health system, not to mention the frustration expressed by many Canberra GPs about specialist access.

The reality is that the ACT public health system provides more outpatient specialist services than most other Australian jurisdictions. This is both an accident of history and a necessity in the current health system. I am really keen on getting more of the data out, but it is not as simple as Ms Castley and Mr Rattenbury seem to think. I can say, and some of this data is public from previous years, that CHS has provided well over 800,000 outpatient appointments in this financial year to date. For context, there are about 1.7 million outpatient contact points in the financial year to date across specialties, and that means the teams need to work through them to provide the data about outpatient appointments, just for 2024-25, across different parts of the Digital Health Record, which has been designed with clinicians to work for them. That exacerbates the challenges in bringing data together in a consistent way to enable it to be reported in a cleansed, consistent and reliable way.

Speaking of data, Ms Castley went to great pains to say that you can fudge data and use it in a way that works for you. She used the overdue patients data from the Canberra Health Services website and used percentages, as she did in question time here on 6 March, when I took a question on notice. Ms Castley indicated that the number of overdue patients ready for care had increased in the period from October 2024 to February 2025. But, when you look at the raw numbers, while it is true that the percentage overdue had increased, the raw number of people had actually reduced, but Ms Castley did not mention that. The number of overdue ready-for-care category 1 patients had decreased, from 129 to 122; and the overall number of category 1 ready-for-care patients waiting for surgery also decreased, from 611 to 519.

The number of overdue ready-for-care orthopaedic category 2 patients did increase, but that was due to the management of long-wait category 3 patients and long-wait category 2 patients. We have been focused on getting through those long-wait patients, some of whom were on individual clinicians' waiting lists. They were put on those waiting lists by the individual clinicians, despite the fact that they knew that their waiting list was very extensive and that those people would have very, very long waits, but that was the way that the waiting lists were managed within the specialty.

I agree with Ms Castley that nothing is more important than quality patient care, and that means care in an environment where staff are free from bullying and harassment. In my time as minister, we have seen a significant reduction in reporting of bullying and harassment and significantly increased confidence in Canberra Health Services that, if staff experience or witness bullying and harassment, something will be done. We want to see care that is consistent and evidence-based, and we want to see care where people are treated, in turn, with equity based on their clinical urgency.

I was really pleased that, when CHS underwent short-notice assessment against the 151 actions from the eight National Safety and Quality Health Service Standards in February this year, CHS had no “not mets” against any actions for this assessment visit. It is another accreditation that they have passed with flying colours. But that does not mean that we cannot do better. We know we can do better. We know we have to do more. That is why we have invested in the Integrated Operations Centre; it is why we have invested in the planned care work; it is why we have invested in improvements to our emergency department, which has seen significant improvements in emergency department waiting times; and it is why in the budget—the Treasurer has agreed that I can announce it here—we are investing \$13 million over three years in a transformation program to support innovation and ensure that Canberra Health Services remains accessible, accountable and sustainable into the future. This review or evaluation—whatever you want to call it—will be an important part of the broader piece of work, as will the two pieces of work that are also being undertaken by the Auditor-General over the next year.

The Auditor-General recently released their 2025-26 performance assessment plan for the year. They will be looking at reform of outpatient service delivery, building on a previous report. They will be looking at strategic management of system reform, resourcing practices, referral practices, capacity planning and use of clinic spaces. The Auditor-General will also be looking at the Digital Health Record, including implementation and benefits realisation. In undertaking the work that the motion calls for today, we will work to ensure that it is not duplicative with the work of the Auditor-General and will work collaboratively with them. As I said, I am consistently seeking to improve the data that is available in our health system. I absolutely recognise, as I have many times, that the implementation of the Digital Health Record has impacted that, and the data remediation project continues to be a priority, as does investment in planned care.

Ms Castley has talked a lot about cardiology and orthopaedics, so I want to table a couple of pages. The first is on the reduction in the elective waitlist for the Cardiac Catheterisation Lab at Canberra Hospital. The work that the team has done has seen a 45 per cent reduction in the waitlist for the Cardiac Catheterisation Lab at Canberra Hospital between April 2024 and May 2025. The other document I am tabling is in relation to timely management of category 1 patients in cardiology, which has seen a reduction to May 2025 to zero per cent category 1 breaches for devices; zero per cent category 1 breaches for TOE and cardioversions; a reduction from 55 per cent to 25 per cent for interventional procedures; and a slight reduction—this is the work that is ongoing—from 93 per cent to 80 per cent for electrophysiology, but a third electrophysiology staff specialist commenced on 26 May and that work is well underway. I was really pleased to visit the cardiology team the other week to see the incredible work that they are doing to reform their processes to ensure that people are getting in on time, relevant to clinical urgency.

Also, going to one of Mr Rattenbury’s points, I visited outpatient paediatrics and talked to them about the work that they have been doing to reduce—and I absolutely agree with Mr Rattenbury—completely unacceptable wait times for outpatient paediatrics. The ACT government has invested significantly in outpatient paediatrics following the release of the Child and Adolescent Clinical Services Plan. Mr Rattenbury is well aware

that this is an area of passion for me and something that I am absolutely committed to. I thank the Child and Adolescent Clinical Services Expert Panel, which contributed to that work and will continue to invest in that space.

I present the following papers:

Reduction in Elective Waitlist—Cardiac Catheter Lab, Canberra Hospital (April 2024 – May 2025), undated.

Timely Management of Category 1 Patients, undated.

**MS CASTLEY** (Yerrabi—Leader of the Opposition) (4.50), in reply: I really appreciate everyone's time this afternoon. I know we have a lot on today, so I will be very brief. I again thank everyone for being collaborative. This is something that is very important to me. I have had stakeholders talk to me for such a long time about it and I am really happy with the result today. Thank you.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

## **Papers**

### **Motion to take note of papers**

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

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

## **Legal Affairs—Standing Committee**

### **Scrutiny report 7**

**MR CAIN** (Ginninderra) (4.52): I present the following report:

Legal Affairs—Standing Committee (Legislative Scrutiny Role)—Scrutiny Report 7, dated 17 June 2025, together with a copy of the extracts of the relevant minutes of proceedings and revised extracts of minutes for Report 6.

I seek leave to make a brief statement.

Leave granted.

**MR CAIN**: Scrutiny report No 7 contains the committee's comments on seven bills, five pieces of subordinate legislation, one national law and three government responses. The report was circulated to members when the Assembly was not sitting. I commend the report to the Assembly.

## **Environment, Planning, Transport and City Services—Standing Committee**

### **Statement by chair**

**MS CLAY** (Ginninderra) (4.53): Pursuant to standing order 246A, I wish to make a statement on behalf of the Standing Committee on Environment, Planning, Transport



and City Services relating to its inquiry into the role and future of Woden town centre in the context of a compact city.

At its meeting on 29 May 2025, the committee adopted a wide-ranging inquiry into the current and future zoning needs of Woden town centre. This inquiry will examine how the planning system can support the social, economic and environmental prosperity of Woden.

The committee is seeking feedback from the community, business, government and any other interested stakeholders to inform its report. The terms of reference are broad and seek to examine the full range of issues relevant to Woden town centre, including its housing needs; employment and economic activity; health and education infrastructure; transport both to and within the town centre; and its sustainability and resilience to climate change.

Submissions for this inquiry are due by 22 August 2025. The committee intends to hold public hearings towards the end of 2025, with a view to presenting a report at some point in 2026.

### **Statement by chair**

**MS CLAY** (Ginninderra) (4.54): Pursuant to standing order 246A, I wish to make a statement on behalf of the Standing Committee on Environment, Planning, Transport and City Services relating to its inquiry into the effectiveness of Fix My Street.

On 14 May 2025, the Assembly resolved to request that the committee inquire into a report on the effectiveness of Fix My Street, the ACT government online tool for reporting matters to the Transport Canberra and City Services Directorate for attention.

The committee considered the proposed terms of reference in the Assembly resolution and, at its meeting on 29 May 2025, adopted a slightly amended version of these terms of reference, which, in the committee's view, still capture the essence of the Assembly's proposed inquiry.

Submissions for this inquiry are due on 22 August 2025, and the committee will seek to hold public hearings later in 2025. The Assembly resolution requested that, should the committee adopt this inquiry, it report back by the first sitting day in December 2025. At this stage, the committee intends to meet the reporting date requested by the Assembly.

## **Integrity Commission and Statutory Office Holders—Standing Committee**

### **Statement by chair**

**MR COCKS** (Murrumbidgee) (4.55): 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 a new inquiry.

On Wednesday, 9 April 2025, the ACT Legislative Assembly referred to the Standing Committee on the Integrity Commission and Statutory Office Holders a request to

undertake an inquiry into the issues surrounding transparency arrangements for members.

The committee considered this request at private meetings on 29 April 2025 and on 20 May 2025, and has agreed to proceed with the inquiry, but has amended the terms of reference for the inquiry to:

The Committee has resolved to inquire into and report on the effectiveness of transparency measures for Executive and Non-Executive members of the ACT Legislative Assembly.

The change to the terms of reference has the main effect of broadening the terms of reference to that which was referred to the committee by the Assembly. Submissions to the inquiry are due by 6 August 2025. The committee intends to provide an interim report by the last sitting day in September 2025.

## **Public Accounts and Administration—Standing Committee Statement by Deputy Chair**

**MS CARRICK** (Murrumbidgee) (4.56): Pursuant to standing order 246A, I wish to make a statement on behalf of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts and Administration relating to a new inquiry.

On Tuesday, 13 May 2025, the Assembly passed a motion that requested the committee to inquire into the administration of the Home Buyer Concession Scheme. The committee has decided to hold the inquiry and will examine, in particular, stamp duty concessions eligibility, including self-assessment and reassessment processes.

Submissions for this inquiry are open until 29 August 2025, and the committee hopes to hear from a wide range of stakeholders, including industry groups, peak bodies, academics and individuals.

## **Appropriation Bill 2025-2026**

**Mr Steel**, pursuant to notice, presented the bill, its explanatory statement, a Human Rights Act compatibility statement and the following supplementary papers:

Budget 2025-2026—Financial Management Act, pursuant to section 10—

Budget at a Glance.

Budget Outlook.

Budget Statements—

A—ACT Electoral Commission | ACT Executive | ACT Integrity Commission  
| Auditor-General | Office of the Legislative Assembly.

B—Chief Minister, Treasury and Economic Development Directorate together  
with associated agencies.

C—Health and Community Services Directorate | ACT Local Hospital  
Network | Canberra Health Services | Housing ACT | ACT Health  
Directorate—Discontinued

D—Justice and Community Safety Directorate | Legal Aid Commission (ACT)  
| Public Trustee and Guardian for the ACT.

E—City and Environment Directorate | Transport Canberra Operations |  
Cemeteries and Crematoria Authority | ACT Gambling and Racing  
Commission | Environment, Planning and Sustainable Development  
Directorate.

F—Education Directorate.

G—Infrastructure Canberra.

Financial Management Act, pursuant to subsection 62(1)—Statements of Intent—  
2025-2026—

ACT Long Service Leave Authority.

Building and Construction Industry Training Fund Authority.

Title read by Clerk.

**MR STEEL** (Murrumbidgee—Treasurer, Minister for Planning and Sustainable  
Development, Minister for Heritage and Minister for Transport) (4.57): I move:

That this bill be agreed to in principle.

Mr Speaker, I acknowledge the Ngunnawal people, the traditional custodians of the  
land on which we are meeting today and recognise other First Nations people and  
families who have connections to the lands that we are meeting on.

The 2025-26 budget invests in our growing city and delivers on our commitments to  
Canberrans.

I would like to thank all my colleagues, especially the Chief Minister, Andrew Barr, the  
Deputy Chief Minister, Yvette Berry, and the Minister for Finance, Rachel  
Stephen-Smith, for their support in delivering this budget and our plans for Canberra.

This is a budget for all Canberrans. As Treasurer, it is my first budget, and it is a Labor  
budget.

This means it reflects our values and delivers on our progressive and practical plans for  
Canberra.

It is a budget for better healthcare, more housing, new infrastructure, better jobs,  
growing wages and support for the vulnerable Canberrans in our community.

And it is a budget that delivers better services, not cuts.

## **Health**

Mr Speaker, budgets are about choices.

The decisions a government makes in the budget reflect its priorities.

For our Labor team that choice is clear.

We will always invest in a strong public health system.

We are working every day to make sure that Canberrans have access to the health care they need, when they need it.

It is why in this budget we are delivering the biggest investment in the public health system in our city's history.

We will invest an additional \$1.196 billion to support the health of Canberrans—responding to growing demand and increased costs and expanding health services closer to home.

This builds on our track record of strong investments in public health care and hospital infrastructure, including hiring more nurses, doctors and allied healthcare professionals, and sets up our health system for the future.

We are delivering on our commitment to deliver 70,000 elective surgeries over four years.

And making investments to support targeted interventions that support the efficient delivery of care and ensure better patient experience.

We will also look after and care for Canberrans suffering from chronic diseases, which has grown to 18,500 more outpatient appointments.

Like all jurisdictions, our public hospital system is facing extraordinary pressure. With higher demand and growing costs, our public hospitals are seeing more patients, with more complex health needs.

Canberrans rightly have the expectation that when they present to an emergency department, they will receive quality public health care at their time of need.

To address the pressures our health system faces, we will invest beyond just our public hospitals and provide more support for primary care, our healthcare workforce and mental health services.

We will invest \$7.3 million to support general practice with bulk-billing incentives, wellbeing and professional development support for GPs, and more junior doctor placements.

We will grow the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workforce and address systemic barriers to participation with a \$2.4 million investment.

We will build on our investments for mental health services by committing \$9.5 million to strengthen community-based mental health programs.

Our investment in health through this budget is about recognising the ongoing impact of the increased demand and cost of delivering high-quality public health system, while making new and sustainable investments in our health workforce and local

infrastructure to deliver the health system Canberrans expect.

## **Housing**

Mr Speaker, a key priority for our government is housing.

A home provides the foundation for so many aspects of a person's life—for health, education, work, family and so much in between.

We believe there is a moral and economic imperative to supply more homes and ensure that all Canberrans can afford housing in our city—to buy or rent.

And it is why we are investing more than \$145 million in housing to support 30,000 new homes by 2030.

We will focus on affordability, supply, sustainability and smart planning, to ensure we use every lever at our disposal to tackle housing supply.

This budget brings together land release, planning reform, housing delivery and tax reform to meet the needs of a growing city.

It includes direct investment in new social and affordable homes, with more public housing built in partnership with the Australian government through the Housing Australia Future Fund and the Social Housing Accelerator; \$20 million for the Affordable Housing Project Fund and 300 more build-to-rent homes.

Proposed missing middle housing reforms will provide a choice of homes where people want to live.

Budget investment in further planning reforms will provide opportunities for new housing and community facilities in well-located areas, particularly around town centres, group centres, local shops and public transport corridors.

The government is also investing in our productivity agenda—working with the construction sector to streamline planning and building processes and reduce or remove regulatory barriers to ensure that new homes can be built sooner.

And we will invest in the people needed to build new homes, through a further investment in skills in the budget.

Doubling the Try a Trade Program in schools to support more young women to enter the construction industry.

And supporting every person that wants to take up an apprenticeship with a host employer by increasing training subsidies to 90 per cent for carpentry, plumbing, tiling, bricklaying and a range of other critical construction occupations.

These initiatives will enable the construction of tens of thousands of new homes for Canberrans over the next five years.

## **Economy**

Mr Speaker, the ACT economy is strong.

The government forecasts that Gross State Product will be three and a quarter per cent and rise over the forward estimates, compared to two and a quarter per cent nationally. Employment and population will grow by one and three-quarters per cent, with wages growing faster than inflation, and with CPI expected to be two and three-quarters per cent. For this government, a further key economic metric is shown by Canberra having the highest quality of life in the world.

We have the lowest unemployment rate in the country, and jobs will grow faster than the population.

Real wages are growing, and inflation is easing. Interest rates are coming down, which is welcome news for household budgets and business investment.

We have the highest median income of any state or territory and a growing population.

Canberra has a growing and diverse private sector, with the fastest rate of business growth in the nation.

The economic indicators I am presenting today would have been very different if Labor had not won the federal election this year.

The Liberal's plan to cut 15 per cent of all jobs in Canberra would have sent a wrecking ball throughout the economy and our budget.

Last month, Canberrans, and Australians, comprehensively repudiated the Liberal's plan to make deep cuts to the public service.

I am pleased to say that with the election of the federal Labor government, we now have economic stability, with a federal government that actually backs the public service and continues to invest in the national capital.

And we have an ACT Labor government that is collaborating with them to confront the challenges we face and work on shared priorities.

## **Tough decisions**

Mr Speaker, our strong economy provides the sound foundation we need to get the budget on a more sustainable footing.

In recent years, facing extraordinary challenges, from the pandemic to natural disasters and higher inflation, the government stepped in to support the community, business and the economy.

We used the budget to provide important emergency relief during the pandemic and in the inflationary period that followed, to support cost of living.

This put pressure on our fiscal position, as costs for government also increased but fees and charges were not increased to meet these costs, and, in many cases, they were paused, waived or deferred.

Coming out of the pandemic, the cost of delivering public health and hospital services has also been rising faster than anyone has predicted. Every jurisdiction in Australia is experiencing this trend.

Commonwealth funding for our public hospitals has also been declining, with the ACT's commonwealth contribution rate set to be the lowest in the country and without action under a new five-year National Health Reform Agreement.

With the high inflationary period ending and interest rates beginning to fall, the time is right to adjust our fiscal strategy.

It is why, as we make a significant investment to maintain and grow our public health system, difficult decisions have had to be made to return the ACT budget to a sustainable footing.

We will do this without making deep cuts. The Canberra community expects the government to continue to deliver these critical services, not to cut them.

We will not slash the public service or cancel much-needed infrastructure. That approach does not align with the values of Canberrans or our Labor government.

## **Expenditure**

Mr Speaker, the government will make sensible savings by constraining the rate of growth in government expenses, saving \$282 million over the forward estimates as we reprioritise expenditure and budget controls.

Through the machinery of government reforms, we are prioritising work to ensure we are working efficiently and in line with the community's expectations.

Over the next four years, the government will constrain growth in both employee and non-employee expenditure across ACT government agencies and directorates to ensure it is sustainable into the future.

The public service will continue to grow over time, especially as we deliver our commitments to the community to support our hospitals and schools.

## **Revenue**

Mr Speaker, in the budget the ACT government has also made the difficult decision to increase revenue to fund the pressures on our hospitals.

The Canberra community is being called on to contribute to the financial sustainability of our health system through a \$250 health levy. This will be paid in addition to rates, which will increase on average in 2025-26 by 3.75 per cent for residential land.

We will also ask the business community to contribute to the major new initiatives that will drive economic activity through changes to payroll tax.

From 2026-27 we will broaden the payroll tax base by reducing the tax-free threshold to \$1.75 million while also reducing the initial payroll tax rate to 6.75 per cent. Our payroll tax-free threshold will continue to be substantially higher than surrounding New South Wales, and businesses with payroll of less than \$4 million will continue to pay less tax in the ACT than New South Wales.

We will also reduce the level of concessions applied to motor vehicle stamp duty for zero emissions vehicles, as the market in Canberra shifts heavily towards them, with the availability of more affordable electric vehicle models.

I want to assure the community that we have not taken the decision to introduce new revenue measures lightly, but it is necessary to balance public finances with community expectations of continued services.

### **Overall fiscal position**

Mr Speaker, because of the steps we have taken and strong continued economic growth, we will return the budget to balance over the forward estimates.

The budget forecasts a headline net operating balance deficit of \$424.9 million in 2025-26, following our further investment in our public health system, before returning to a surplus of \$47.9 million from 2027-28, and growing in 2028-29 to \$330.6 million. The territory's headline net operating balance as a share of Gross State Product is consistent with other states and territories over the forward estimates.

The territory's strong balance sheet will ensure we continue to deliver these services, while net debt and net financial liabilities remain about average compared to other Australian states and territories.

A strong increase in the net operating cash position over the four years to 2028-29, will also ensure we can continue to deliver key infrastructure improvements to support future community needs, economic growth and jobs.

### **Economic development and major projects**

To support further economic growth and deliver on community needs, the government will continue to make major investments in infrastructure projects in a way that is targeted and achievable. The total infrastructure program is worth \$8.1 billion over five years.

We will always seek to ensure these projects are funded in partnership with the Australian government as our two governments deliver for Canberra.

Investments support entertainment, cultural and sporting projects, like a new Canberra aquatic centre at Commonwealth Park, planning and designing a new convention and entertainment precinct and the Canberra Theatre Centre redevelopment.



We will continue further work on the new northside hospital and continue investment in public transport infrastructure through light rail.

The government will continue to shape the infrastructure pipeline to match the delivery capacity of the market, explore different infrastructure delivery models and ensure our investments are targeted to support economic growth.

### **Arts and night-time economy**

We will support the night-time economy with discounts on liquor licenses, so that our night-time economy and arts sector can thrive.

We will also invest more than \$7 million to support local artists and back the creative industries that enrich our city's identity and economy.

This investment will boost financial support for Canberra's artists and cultural organisations, progress heritage conservation works at iconic sites and build momentum for Canberra's bid to join the UNESCO Creative Cities Network as a city of design.

We will also invest in our local screen and digital gaming industry through funding for Screen Canberra and the screen and digital games funding program.

### **Climate action and environmental protection**

Mr Speaker, Canberrans value their local environment and are ambitious for climate action.

The budget delivers funding to appoint a government landscape architect and office to will lead work on the ACT's first landscape plan.

This will ensure that as Canberra continues to grow into the future, we proactively preserve the bush capital we all know and love.

We are also making investments to make sure we lower emissions and deliver energy savings. Supporting more businesses and households to become more energy efficient will help reduce energy bills and set up our city for the future. This includes government action to switch off government gas assets in favour of electric options.

### **Supporting our community**

Mr Speaker, as a Labor government we will deliver on our election commitments to support those most in need.

This will always mean making sure Canberrans can access free public health care and we will also supply more affordable housing.

This budget makes targeted investments in cost-of-living support.

We will permanently increase the electricity, water and gas rebate to \$800 for over 40,000 low-income households.

We will support apprentices with a \$250 cost-of-living payment, and a further \$250 for first year apprentices for new tools and equipment.

We will extend the Future of Education Equity Fund and make one school camp free for public primary school students.

We know that supporting the most vulnerable in our community is only possible because of the community sector.

That is why we will invest over \$55 million in community inclusion and support, including \$10 million to give an important funding boost to community sector partners.

We will work with them to tackle the critical issue of responding to domestic, family and sexual violence.

We will invest \$24.5 million to provide essential frontline services and a further \$6 million to Aboriginal Community Controlled and led Organisations to provide culturally safe services.

### **Community safety**

Mr Speaker, everyone deserves to feel safe in the community.

Our police and emergency services are the very first people you call when you are faced with an unexpected emergency.

To show our commitment to community safety and the frontline service work police do, we will invest \$112.9 million in ACT Policing and deliver a real wage rise to all our police officers.

We are also funding planning for a police station in the Molonglo Valley and a future emergency services facility in Casey and investing in the equipment our emergency services use each day.

### **Delivering for our suburbs**

Mr Speaker, at the election we promised to deliver new and renewed infrastructure across our suburbs and invest in better public transport services.

This budget will provide more funding to upgrade shops, invest in active travel infrastructure, deliver new community sporting infrastructure, better and upgraded playgrounds and invest in tree planting, mowing and other city services.

We will buy an additional 30 new battery electric buses to grow our fleet and deliver more services, and we will increase services on Sundays from term 3.

### **Education**

Mr Speaker, I grew up in a family of public school teachers.

Every child of a teacher knows how important their roles are in transforming young lives for the better.

For me, they have instilled a deep value of social justice and compassion—values that define my approach to this budget.

Before I entered politics, I worked towards getting the best outcomes for young children through early childhood education and I am proud to be part of a government that recognises that, through our commitments to early childhood education and free three-year-old preschool.

Now as a father to my own daughter, Maeve, I know how important it is that we invest in life-long learning from those first days in early childhood education right through formal schooling and through to university and vocational education and training.

This budget will invest a further \$138 million in education and training to support all Canberrans getting an education. This will include more investment in our public schools through new infrastructure and more programs that support vulnerable children.

It also provides funding for the new CIT Woden campus and more investment in free school meals and free school camps.

In addition to this, the budget delivers better literacy and numeracy outcomes through the Better and Fairer Schools Agreement, in partnership with the Australian government.

## **Conclusion**

Mr Speaker, Canberra is a progressive and inclusive place and this budget reflects our community.

The government is committed to ensuring Canberrans have the high level of services that they expect to be delivered, while we continue to invest in our growing city.

The budget delivers a record investment in health and makes a landmark investment in housing supply. It strengthens skills and education while providing support to the Canberrans who need it most.

The budget funds the infrastructure our city needs, ensuring we deliver on the commitments Labor made at the election.

It puts our finances on a sustainable path by taking responsible expenditure and revenue decisions.

Our budget is an investment that will sustain local jobs, drive economic growth and ensure that current and future generations enjoy the same high quality of life that our city is known for, the world over.

I commend the bill to the Assembly.

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

## **Appropriation (Office of the Legislative Assembly) Bill 2025-2026**

**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) (5.19): I move:

That this bill be agreed to in principle.

I also present today the very important Office of the Legislative Assembly appropriation bill, which provides funding for the running of the Legislative Assembly and the officers of the Assembly.

The budget provides \$5.45 million in funding to the ACT Integrity Commission to provide further resourcing to increase capacity and to address the government's commitment earlier this year to support the commission to initiate a suitable inquiry into lobbying in the ACT.

It provides \$2.29 million in funding to provide ongoing additional resourcing to the ACT Audit Office to ensure that the Auditor-General continues to have the resourcing needed to deliver, on average, the nine annual performance audit reports and other auditing requirements.

The bill also provides \$2.71 million in funding to the Office of the Legislative Assembly to install security improvements to entrances of the Assembly, and an additional \$9.41 million to provide additional resourcing to support non-executive members in the Eleventh Assembly. This additional funding recognises the new make-up of the parliament and increased staffing allowances. I commend the appropriation to the Assembly.

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

## **Statements by members**

### **Richardson—shops**

**MISS NUTTALL** (Brindabella) (5.21): I would like to take the opportunity to thank the people of Richardson. The motion that was passed earlier today was the result of a great deal of work over a very long time. I am the latest in a series of community members, Ms Tough included, who have fought to see change and a second chance for Richardson shops.

In particular, I want to thank everyone who came out to the barbecue we held at Richardson shops. We received a phenomenal turnout. Everyone was so keen to talk

about their memories of the shops and their vision for how it could be improved. It was a moment of community solidarity of which we do not see nearly enough in Tuggeranong, and one I sincerely hope to be part of again.

Thank you in particular to the community members who let me interview them about their vision for the shops. You were so open, and you got your thoughts out in one take, like absolute pros. Please teach me how to do so later! Special thanks to my wonderful electorate officer, Cindy, who made it all possible and worked the barbie for the whole time. My entire team did a huge job on the barbecue.

Action on Richardson shops is the will of a huge proportion of the community. I have been absolutely honoured to have the opportunity to bring the desire of the community to the Assembly. I want Richardson and all of Tuggeranong to know that I will bring their concerns to this Assembly. I said it in my very first speech, and I will say it again: politicians are tools, and I hope you use me.

### **Health—scleroderma**

**MS CLAY** (Ginninderra) (5.22): I have recently been contacted by a constituent named Liz, who suffers from the rare, incurable and debilitating autoimmune condition known as scleroderma. I have a friend with this condition, too, so I know a little bit, up close, about how difficult it can be.

The disease affects connective tissue and, while it is most visible in the thickening of the skin, it can also affect the heart, lungs, kidneys, digestive system and blood vessels, and it can be fatal. It leads to very serious consequences that are possible to live with but which are really hard—like having to feed through a straw for the rest of your life.

I want to thank Liz for getting in touch and for the work she is doing. She started a support group in Canberra, and the national association, Scleroderma Australia, has now been going strong for 20 years.

Autoimmune diseases affect as many as one in 10 people and women are more often affected than men, and these numbers are rising. Canberra has only eight rheumatologists. They are not able to meet the need for check-ups every three to six months for people with scleroderma. Liz is advocating for a nurse-led scleroderma clinic. We also need to look at the implications of rising rates of autoimmune disease more broadly. We need more rheumatology specialists in Canberra and more support services, not just for scleroderma but for all autoimmune diseases.

### **Planning and development—former CSIRO Ginninderra site**

**MR CAIN** (Ginninderra) (5.24): I rise to speak briefly about the urgent need for housing development to be expedited on the former CSIRO Ginninderra site in north Belconnen.

The ACT Labor government commenced talks to buy the 701 hectares of land in November 2022, with the express idea of providing thousands of new homes for Canberrans within the existing urban footprint. This slated development was also a key Canberra Liberals election commitment at the last ACT election. Despite all of the

posturing of those opposite that federal Labor and ACT would produce unrivalled levels of government cooperation, it is clear that they could not cooperate on this and, frankly, probably could not cooperate on a chook raffle.

This lengthy process has kept prime developable land locked away from Canberrans, exacerbating our housing affordability and supply crisis. The most frustrating part of all of this is that this deal is not even for the full 701 hectares; rather, they have divided the block and are seeking to buy only 240 hectares east of Kuringa Drive.

The CSIRO site has the potential to transform Belconnen, north Canberra and our city itself, and it is disappointing that, despite the promises of wonderful cooperation between local and federal Labor, it is not happening.

*Discussion concluded.*

## **Adjournment**

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

That the Assembly do now adjourn.

## **Mrs Wendy Altamore—tribute**

**MS LEE** (Kurrajong) (5.25): I stand to pay tribute to Wendy Altamore, who passed away on Sunday, 6 April this year, aged 68. I acknowledge Wendy's husband and prominent disability advocate, Robert Altamore, and Wendy's friend Robert, who are both with us this afternoon in the chamber, and her family members and friends who are watching via the livestream.

Wendy was born on 3 November 1957 to Jim and Beryl Scully in Sydney. Although Wendy faced a number of lifelong health challenges, including asthma, poor vision, diabetes, and heart and kidney disease, she never let any of that get in the way of her doing what she wanted to do in serving her community. Having asthma led her to take up swimming, and she developed into a very talented backstroker. As a teenager, she trained in Forbes Carlile's swimming squad and reached the New South Wales state championship level.

Growing up, Wendy was a keen horserider and tennis player, and joined her father and brother on the golf course, too. As an active member of her local Anglican Church community, Wendy demonstrated from an early age her commitment to serving and helping others.

Wendy went on to complete a Bachelor of Education in English literature and history, before moving to Canberra in 1981, at which time she taught at St Edmund's and St Clare's Catholic schools. She went on to become a relief teacher in numerous ACT schools, where she taught English literature, drama and remedial English.

Wendy also joined the YWCA, where she made many friends. One of those friends introduced her to Robert, who she married in 1985. Wendy and Robert lived in Lyons, before moving to Stirling. Wendy made many lifelong friends amongst her local

community here in Canberra and throughout Australia, especially through the Canberra Blind Society and Blind Citizens Australia.

Wendy became more than just a friend to many. She became a trusted companion who helped vision-impaired people with everyday tasks. She would read them their mail, help them to get around and look after them when they needed it. Both Wendy and Robert became involved in Radio 1RPH, a wonderful community service that turns print into sound for listeners across Canberra and regional New South Wales. It is an organisation that many of us in the chamber are very familiar with. I have been a volunteer, and I know Ms Cheyne has. Mrs Dunne, a former Speaker, was also a great champion. I have spoken about Radio 1RPH many times in this chamber.

Many of you will be aware of Robert's long-time involvement with Radio 1RPH, but Wendy also had a long association with the organisation. Wendy produced the Christian program for 40 years, right until her death earlier this year. It was an incredible achievement, and a valuable one to so many.

From her early days at Radio 1RPH, Wendy quickly became an integral part of the organisation. She would organise the social events, from small morning teas to large fundraisers. She was a much loved and respected member of the team, and well regarded for her very sharp organisational skills.

Another organisation close to her and Robert's hearts was the Canberra Friends of Dili, which was an organisation that encouraged mutual educational, cultural and business connections between the capitals of Australia and Timor-Leste and promoted the Canberra-Dili friendship city relationship.

Wendy and Robert were both heavily involved—Robert as treasurer and Wendy working to raise funds—in helping the work of the Ryder-Cheshire home, which provided relief for ill and disabled Timorese people who were displaced from their homes, the Alola Foundation, and many other organisations that provided medical services, education and training for women, girls and young people in Timor-Leste.

Despite the many health challenges that Wendy had, Wendy lived a full and wonderful life. She loved living in Canberra, and her work in the community helped her to make lifelong friends with whom she shared her love of literature and the arts, and her passion for serving and helping others.

Wendy made a huge contribution throughout Canberra with her tireless community service and her commitment to helping others, and she will be missed by so many. I extend my sincerest condolences to Wendy's husband, Robert, her friend Robert, who is joining us as well, her many family and friends, many of whom are watching via the livestream, and the many Canberrans who have been enriched by having Wendy in their lives.

### **Energy—fossil fuels**

**MS CLAY** (Ginninderra) (5.30): “The past is no longer a reliable guide to the future.” That is a line from an ABC article yesterday, and it could be about any number of things that are happening right now. This particular article was about climate change—about

the flooding and fires that we now see regularly in Australia, and the fact that they are vast, unpredictable, uninsurable and previously unimaginable.

The writer pointed out that our federal government is late in delivering its national climate risk assessment. Locally, we are expecting a new climate strategy this year, and we are all hoping for strong responses that put people and the planet first. We are living in a time of change and people are worried. And what do our leaders do? They approve new gas extensions.

Federal environment minister Murray Watt has just approved the North West gas shelf extension. It will operate until 2070—20 years beyond even the most conservative government's aim for net zero, and decades past the point where science tells us we have to stop burning fossil fuel if we want to live. Most of that gas will go overseas. Most of those profits will go overseas. That project will deliver almost nothing to Australia's public purse, and it will not help our energy transition.

Murray Watt was in a hurry to get it done. The project was under consideration for six years, and one of his first acts after becoming minister was to approve it. Hours before announcing that project, UNESCO said that the decision risks the Murujuga petroglyphs, the first representations of the human face, and it means they cannot be listed for world heritage.

The North West gas shelf is Australia's largest gas project. Australia is the world's third largest gas exporter, after the US and Qatar. Australia's gas reserves are more than 40 times our annual emissions and, in a climate crisis, this is our primary contribution to the world. People are desperate to do whatever they can to stop our leaders making these decisions. Doctors for the Environment are challenging this decision in court. When your GPs start suing your MPs, something has gone wrong.

There was a climate rally at the offices of DCCEEW right after the decision. We heard from local environmentalist Amy Blain and from Laura Nuttall. Rising Tide then held a film night at the Polo to promote the blockade which, each November, turns the coal ships around in Newcastle. That night was hosted by Emma Davidson, and the speakers were Jessie Price and Richard Denniss.

Richard, who is pretty good on the economy, told us that our leaders are not. He said most Australians want to stop new fossil fuel expansion and want to tax it properly. He said our leaders are listening to a small minority of fossil fuel executives, and politicians do not realise how out of step they are and how bad their decisions are for our economy.

Here in the ACT we have signed up to the fossil fuel non-proliferation treaty. I put this treaty up to the ACT parliament in 2021, and I am delighted to say that the ACT government, as a whole, signed up. At that time, we became the highest level of government to back it. Andrew Barr, Yvette Berry, Chris Steel and Tara Cheyne all personally signed on, as did every single Greens MLA. The Canberra Liberals did not sign on, but the ACT government has adopted it.

The treaty was modelled on nuclear non-proliferation treaties, which are also, suddenly and brutally, relevant now. It is based on the simple fact that you cannot change course unless you convince many people to change. The first call in that treaty is to end the



new expansion of gas.

Today I asked our new Labor climate minister whether she agreed with the treaty and why she had not signed up. She was here when it was agreed by government in 2021, and she was also asked about this by a member of the public on radio three weeks ago. She said that she has not had time to consider it, but the ACT government has already agreed, so I am really confused as to what she needs to reconsider.

Labor are taking some decisions really fast. It took Minister Watt 15 days to approve the North West gas shelf extension, and they are taking other decisions really slowly. We can do better. Here in the ACT, under a Greens climate minister, we cut ACT emissions by 50 per cent on 1990 levels. We took so many steps forward on climate. It is the kind of transformation that we need. We need to see these changes from our Labor leaders and our Liberal leaders, and from all of our decision-makers, in the area of climate.

The past is no longer a reliable guide to the future. That can be frightening or it can be helpful. I am choosing hope, because it beats the alternative.

I say to our leaders: please change. Make a different choice tomorrow than the one you made today and last month. Help us to turn this ship around.

### **McKellar—shops**

**MR CAIN** (Ginninderra) (5.35): I rise today to speak about the ongoing administrative disaster that is the site of the former McKellar shops, located at 2 Bennetts Close. It is my responsibility, as one of the five members for Ginninderra in this place, to call out the fact that the residents of McKellar have been putting up with this undeveloped land for over 13 years.

McKellar is a truly wonderful suburb in North Belconnen that has fostered an amazing and connected community of residents since its founding in the 1980s. McKellar is called home by nearly 3,000 residents, as well as our city's beloved Canberra United Football Club, which competes in the A-League Women's competition at the iconic McKellar Park football stadium. McKellar has a thriving property market, with a median house price of over \$1.1 million, according to the latest All Homes data. It is a suburb that has embraced multiculturalism, with 33½ per cent of McKellar residents having been born overseas, according to the latest census data. McKellar residents are well educated, with 39.4 per cent of McKellar residents having obtained a bachelor's degree, or higher, in education. Finally, the median weekly household income in McKellar is an impressive \$2,687, which is nearly \$100 more per week than the national average.

In summary, McKellar residents are inclusive, accomplished and prosperous relative to many Canberrans and, indeed, Australians, so why does the ACT Labor government treat McKellar residents like second-class citizens by leaving the site derelict for so long? I find it absurd and demeaning that McKellar residents have been treated this way for 13 years.

The demolition of the former McKellar shops on block 1, section 51 in McKellar has

resulted in a situation that, arguably, beats the longstanding hole in the ground at Margaret Timpson Park, in terms of neglect and mismanagement in Belconnen. There are few better examples of ACT Labor's neglect of Canberra suburbs than this McKellar site. It is my understanding that the site has had three development applications come and go over the years, in 2011, 2016 and 2022. I note that the most recent DA, approved in February last year, for mixed use commercial development, still leaves the site undeveloped.

In a budget estimates hearing back in August 2022, I probed the then planning minister, Mick Gentleman, about his decision to exercise call-in powers to actually block a proposed mixed use development at the site. I was concerned with Labor's denial of essential community retail amenities for McKellar residents then and I remain concerned now. What a sliding door moment for McKellar residents that the former minister's decision in 2022 has turned out to be. If Mr Gentleman had not blocked that development, would McKellar have a local development, including a retail section? What about the development application in 2016 and the one in 2011? How this issue has been allowed to continue to fester by the ACT Labor government is appalling and neglectful. Therefore, I challenge the planning minister to make sure that the new McKellar development will be built by the end of this term, at the very latest.

I also challenge fellow members for Ginninderra to advocate for McKellar residents to ensure that a new McKellar development, including a commercial and retail sector, will be built by the end of this term. And I challenge McKellar residents not to settle for this new normal that has been forced upon them. As residents of the greatest district in the greatest city in the greatest country in the world, they deserve more than this. It is well past time that we ensure that McKellar residents receive the community and retail amenities they deserve.

### **Education—civics and citizenship**

**MISS NUTTALL** (Brindabella) (5.40): I would like to speak today about the wonderful academics who have taken the time to speak with my team and me recently. In light of several developments in the fields of civics and citizenship, I have been trying to become better informed about the intricacies of the subject. To this end, I have had meetings with Professors Mark Chou, Philippa Collin and Bernard Brown from the ANU, the University of Western Sydney and the University of Canberra, respectively. I cannot say enough how impressed I am, not just with the depth of their knowledge but also with the generosity with which they gave us their time.

We are in a time of huge change, and, like many other subjects, civics is something that needs to be changed and reformed to keep up with the demands of the modern world. I would like to echo some of the key calls from the academics we have spoken with. Civics needs to be about more than just how to vote; it needs to be giving the students the skills to engage with democracy as a concept. We also need to ensure that young people feel an investment in our democracy and are given meaningful opportunities to engage with it from an early age.

On the other side of it is, of course, support for teachers. We need to ensure that teachers are well trained and given the resources necessary to teach civics and citizenship with confidence. It is essential that we never forget to treat young people, whether or not

they can vote, as constituents. The political system forgets young people far too easily and we cannot let that continue. It may be hard to connect with disengaged young people sometimes, and young people may engage with politics in ways that we are well adapted to. Ultimately, engaging with young people is not always easy. It is not an extra effort we should be going to; however, it is part of the job that we all have in this place.

There is momentum for change in civics and citizenship education. With such brilliant minds working on the issue, I am really excited about what young people in Australia will be learning in the near future.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

**The Assembly adjourned at 5.42 pm.**