



DEBATES
OF THE
LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
FOR THE
AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

DAILY HANSARD

Edited proof transcript

22 October 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, 10 November 2025**.

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Wednesday, 22 October 2025

The Assembly met at 10.00 am.

(Quorum formed.)

MR SPEAKER (Mr Parton) (10.02): Members:

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

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

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

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

Petitions

The following petitions were lodged for presentation:

Government—investments and procurement—petitions 55-25 and 69-25

By Mr Braddock, from 1293 and 137 residents, respectively:

Mr Braddock, from 137 and 1293 residents, requesting that the Assembly call on the ACT Government to divest the Territory of any involvements and arrangements with entities implicated in human rights violations, commission an independent inquiry into the matter and amend legislation to ban relevant goods and services (e-Pet 055-25 and Pet 069-25).

Pursuant to standing order 99A, the petitions, having at least 500 signatories, were referred to the Standing Committee on Public Accounts and Administration.

Yarralumla—footpaths—petitions 56-25 and 68-25

By Ms Carrick, from 53 and 57 residents, respectively:

Ms Carrick, from 53 and 57 residents, requesting that the Assembly call on the ACT Government to construct a path along the southern side of Weston Street in Yarralumla to complete the path network in the area (e-Pet 056-25 and Pet 068-25).

Yarralumla—proposed substation—petitions 57-25 and 70-25

By Ms Carrick, from 120 and 84 residents, respectively:

Ms Carrick, from 120 and 84 residents, requesting that the Assembly call on the ACT Government to identify an alternative site for the proposed light rail traction power substation planned for Gunn Street, Yarralumla (e-Pet 057-25 and Pet 070-25).

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.

Banks—dirt bike or pump track—petition 58-25

By **Mr Parton**, from 732 residents:

Mr Parton, from 732 residents, requesting that the Assembly call on the ACT Government to prioritise funding and development of a bike pump track or dirt track at Beau and Jessie Park in Banks (e-Pet 058-25).

Pursuant to standing order 99A, the petition, having at least 500 signatories, was referred to the Standing Committee on Transport and City Services.

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

Motion to take note of petitions

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

That the petitions and responses so lodged be noted.

Government—investments and procurement—petitions 55-25 and 69-25

MR BRADDOCK (Yerrabi) (10.05): I rise today to table a petition signed by more than 1,300 Canberrans that draws the attention of the Assembly to the ACT's obligations towards the people of Palestine under international law. But this is not just about law; it is also about who we are as a community. Canberrans are people who believe in justice, equality, honesty and humanity. We stand up for those who are less fortunate than ourselves. We value multiculturalism and seek to recognise one another's humanity across the divides of distance, politics, privilege, custom and religion. We want an international system that acts consistently and steadfastly against violence and genocide, without excuses or delay.

I have spoken in this place about Palestine many times over the years, and this petition prompts me to do so again. I wish I could say that peace, safety and renewal were within reach in Gaza, but right now that is hard to see. As Canberrans, we have a role to play in bringing about that peace and helping it to become a reality sooner. As of today, last week's hopes of peace via the hostage and prisoner exchange between Palestine and Israel are but a distant memory. The hopes of peace, stability and the ability to rebuild are fleeting at best. Palestinians are still starving and aid agencies have said that the humanitarian situation on the ground is still at crisis point.

This petition is clear and practical in its requests. It builds on the laws and policies we already have in place and asks that we use them to make a real difference. It calls on the ACT government to immediately implement the divestment calls passed by this Assembly more than 18 months ago and report back on the actions taken. It calls for a full divestment from firms and institutions identified by the United Nations as being complicit in human rights violations in Palestine. It asks that the ACT government's responsible investment policy be amended to explicitly incorporate the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights' database, the rulings of the International Court of Justice, and the findings of the Special Rapporteur on the occupied Palestinian territories.

The petition calls for annual compliance reporting to this Assembly. The petition also calls for an independent inquiry into the ACT government's investments, procurement contracts and partnerships with companies that are implicated in human rights violations in Palestine, and, of course, that any such arrangements are terminated immediately.

Finally, it asks for new legislation to ban the sale and procurement of goods and services derived from Israeli settlements. These settlements are illegal under the Fourth Geneva Convention and deemed so by multiple United Nations Security Council resolutions spanning nearly 50 years since the initial occupation of the West Bank in 1967. They are widely recognised as a major obstacle to peace in the region. The only two countries that have departed from this view are Israel itself and, since 2019, the United States.

Here, in the ACT, we can act on these calls. We can and we must uphold our commitment to human rights and international law by taking these practical, principled steps. I urge the government and the Assembly to act on the measures outlined in this petition without delay.

Before I close, I want to acknowledge the members of the Palestine Action Group and the Palestinian community here in Canberra, many of whom are in the gallery with us today. I thank them for their courage, their leadership and their tireless advocacy on this issue. They were instrumental in getting this petition off the ground and their dedication to the cause has not gone unnoticed, and I sincerely thank them for it.

I wish to make one final comment on the ruling about keffiyehs within the Assembly. These are a cultural dress and it is entirely appropriate for members of the Palestinian community to wear them here. Mr Speaker, I understand the reasons you have provided as to why they might also be considered a badge of protest, but I would strongly say that we need to allow members of the Palestinian community to wear their cultural dress as part of their identity as Palestinians.

I commend the petition to the Assembly.

MR HANSON (Murrumbidgee) (10.09): I do not support the petition. I stand with Israel. I stand with the Jewish people. I stand with our Canberra Jewish community. I condemn the Hamas terrorists, I condemn those who support Hamas and its atrocities, and I condemn the anti-Semitic Greens.

Out of order petition**Yarralumla—proposed substation—petitions 57-25 and 70-25**

MS CARRICK (Murrumbidgee) (10.10): I rise to speak on behalf of 520 concerned residents, 204 of whom signed a formal petition and another 316, whose signatures, though out of order, reflect the same deep concern regarding the proposed light rail traction power station in their neighbourhood. The signatures are out of order simply because every signature sheet did not have the header.

I seek leave to table the out of order petitions.

Leave granted.

MS CARRICK: I present the following papers:

Petition which does not conform with the standing orders—Yarralumla—Objection to light rail power substation—Ms Carrick (316 signatures).

Petition which does not conform with the standing orders—Yarralumla—Weston Street—Construction of a path—Ms Carrick (67 signatures).

This proposal raises serious safety concerns. Increased construction traffic on narrow residential streets like Gunn, Kintore, and Guilfoyle Streets poses a direct risk to children and pedestrians. Poor visibility at intersections only heightens the danger. The substation itself introduces fire hazards due to high-voltage equipment and transformer oil, and its location in a residential area makes it vulnerable to sabotage or vandalism. Most alarmingly, the site is adjacent to a culvert known for major flooding, which could exacerbate fire risks and endanger nearby homes and play areas.

Beyond safety, the community impacts are profound. The substation would permanently remove a cherished green space where neighbours gather, children play and the community thrives. The constant hum of transformers, measured at 60 to 80 decibels, would likely be audible from nearby homes, exceeding acceptable night-time noise limits. The 24/7 lighting required for operations and security would spill into homes, disrupting sleep and eroding privacy. Together, these changes would irreversibly damage the character and amenity of our neighbourhood.

The environmental damage is equally troubling. The site is home to several protected species, including the endangered gang-gang cockatoo, the vulnerable superb parrot and diamond firetail, and the critically endangered golden sun moth. The removal of native grasses and mature hollow-bearing trees that are essential for nesting contradicts both ACT and national biodiversity protection goals.

The community is not interested in opposing progress; the community is advocating for better alternatives. Viable options exist. The Denison Street site is further from residences, closer to the proposed Kent Street light rail stop and poses minimal ecological impact. Dudley Street sites meet technical requirements without harming community or wildlife. And underground installation, common in Europe, would eliminate most safety, noise and visual concerns. The community urges the Assembly to reconsider the current proposal and work with them to find a solution that supports infrastructure development while preserving the safety, wellbeing and natural heritage

of our community.

Yarralumla—footpaths—petitions 56-25 and 68-25

MS CARRICK (Murrumbidgee) (10.14): With respect to the Weston Street path missing link petition, I have presented a petition signed by 177 constituents. There are 110 formal signatures and an additional 67 informal signatures, which I have tabled. The petition calls for the completion of a missing link in the local path network along the south side of Weston Street in Yarralumla, between Guilfoyle Street and Hopetoun Circuit. This is not a minor gap; it is a critical route used daily by children walking from Deakin to Yarralumla Primary School, and from Yarralumla to Canberra Girls Grammar Junior School in Deakin. It is also a well-trodden path for Yarralumla residents accessing the Deakin shops on foot.

The ACT government has recently invested \$276,000 in upgrading the adjacent paths and crossings along the west side of Hopetoun Circuit under Adelaide Avenue. Completing the Weston Street link would connect these upgraded paths with the existing Yarralumla footpath network, significantly improving pedestrian safety and ensuring the full benefit of the upgrade is realised. This is a modest but meaningful infrastructure improvement that would enhance safety, accessibility and community connectivity. I urge the government to consider this petition seriously and take action to complete the Weston Street path link.

Government—investments and procurement—petitions 55-25 and 69-25

MS CARRICK (Murrumbidgee) (10.15): I add my voice to the call for the ACT government to divest from the economy of genocide.

Banks—dirt bike or pump track—petition 58-25

MR PARTON (Brindabella) (10.15): I stand to celebrate grassroots democracy, which is really what petitions are all about. In the chamber, we are blessed to have in our presence the most famous mullet in Tuggeranong: young Axel. Axel is at the forefront of the petition for a bike pump track, a dirt track at Beau and Jessie Park in Banks. The principal petitioner, Jess, Axel's mum, is also in the chamber. I heard from Jessica a few months ago. She wrote to me to say that her son Axel was very keen to get some improvements to the park, which is very close to where they live. They find themselves in the situation that a lot of Tuggeranong families face: they do not have the infrastructure in place that allows them to do stuff that they really want to do in facilities that are close by. I met Jessica and Axel at Beau and Jessie Park.

It is interesting. They mentioned the petition to me. Originally, Jess had a two-week period for it, and I said, "No; you need to push this out to at least five or six weeks." I thought that, at best, they might get 100 signatures because it is very localised—it is in the suburb of Banks—but, wow, there were moments when I thought they were going to crack 1,000 signatures. They have certainly gone over the threshold of 500 signatures so that the petition will be referred to the relevant committee for a decision. A lot of the reason for the avalanche of signatures is that Axel is a bit of a rockstar and it is very difficult to say no to him.

One of the beautiful things that we are seeing play out here is that young Axel is going to remember this day forever. It is part of the awakening of the civic citizen that is young Axel. He now understands that, although this parliament is a long way from Banks, it actually represents him and his family. It should also lead us to understand that a lot of meaningless drivel occurs in this chamber, with respect to everybody, but we are ultimately here to represent the Axels and the Jessicas of the world and the Axels and the Jessicas of our suburbs. When it all boils down, most politics is absolutely local.

At this stage, I have not had meaningful engagement with the relevant minister about this. It is important that the family had a vision and they wanted to push it, and I was very keen to assist them in pushing it. I congratulate Axel, Jess and all involved in getting this petition moving. We will see what happens. They have certainly had their voices heard and we will see how the government responds.

Yarralumla—proposed substation—petitions 57-25 and 70-25

MR RATTENBURY (Kurrajong) (10.19): I congratulate Axel on his work. I would like to speak in support of the petition that Ms Carrick brought forward about the relocation of the light rail traction power substation. I was also approached by residents of Yarralumla and they raised similar concerns with me. I visited the site. By that point, Ms Carrick had already agreed to support their petition. I thank her for doing that.

I want to briefly reflect on this. The residents have raised some important points. I implore the government and the planners working on the light rail project to carefully consider the points that they have made. What I particularly like about the work that the residents have done in the area is that they have not only raised their concerns but they have also proposed a range of what, on the face of it, look to be practical alternatives for the location of this power station. I suspect there were probably different views amongst the residents on the merits of the project, but their point around the inappropriateness of the site and the potential for alternatives was very well made. They identified, to my recollection, three or four potential sites for the power station, and I think that is a constructive approach. I would really like the government to consider them. This project should go ahead. The Greens' support for light rail is obviously well understood, but that does not mean that we should not debate elements of the design and different ways we might design them over time.

I thank Ms Carrick for tabling the petition, and, as I said, I implore the government to look at alternative options that might be considered.

Government—investments and procurement—petitions 55-25 and 69-25

MR RATTENBURY (Kurrajong) (10.20): I also want to briefly respond to Mr Hanson's performative and unfortunate intervention that I thought lacked insight and nuance. It is not antisemitic to call for the end of a genocide. Mr Hanson's commentary was blind to the Jews in Canberra who oppose genocide and attest to signing the petition. Mr Speaker, I seek your ruling on labelling the Greens as antisemitic in this chamber. I appreciate that it is a complex ruling and you may want to take some time to consider it. It is helpful that Mr Braddock is no longer in the chair—he would not have been able to rule on this—but I seek your consideration of

Mr Hanson's remarks.

MR SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr Rattenbury. I will discuss further upon getting the transcript. I will look at it. I have to admit to you that I cannot remember the exact wording that was used, but I will examine it.

Banks—dirt bike or pump track—petition 58-25

MS TOUGH (Brindabella) (10.21): I too rise to speak about the petition for a pump track or a dirt bike track at Beau and Jessie Park in Banks. I start by commending the work of five-year-old Axel and his parents, Jess and Ryan. It was really exciting to see Axel and Jess here this morning. The big smile on Axel's face—and he still has a smile on his face—when he saw me walk into the chamber was amazing.

I ran into Axel and Jess a few weeks ago at a birthday party in Lanyon, at another park. Axel told me all about Beau and Jessie Park, all about the bike track and all about the petition, and how cool it was that he was going to be in a Mark Parton video on TikTok—a highlight. Axel could not stop telling me how exciting this is. I am so happy that Axel is here today for the petition to be presented. Axel has been out letterboxing, and he has been telling his friends, including my son, Lachy, about the petition. Axel should be really proud of his efforts and his parents should be as well.

Jess and Axel want to see a local playground upgraded with a pump track to give local kids and teenagers something to do in the Lanyon Valley, particularly in Banks. It is the southernmost suburb of Canberra. I am sure there are people in the chamber who have never been to Banks. It is in the next street from where I live. It is a beautiful part of Canberra. But, like the rest of Tuggeranong, there is a bit of a mood about more things for kids to do in the area. Some kids in neighbouring Gordon made their own pump track during the school holidays and then they were destroyed, so they went back the next week and made a new pump track. So having a permanent feature somewhere in Lanyon would definitely be welcome.

Well done, Axel. Getting over 700 signatures is no small feat at all. There have been a few Lanyon-centric petitions this year and all of them reached over 500 signatures. It shows that those of us way down south are really engaged in things for our community. Seeing kids like Axel involved in democracy and advocating for the community is something that should be encouraged and celebrated. I echo what Mr Speaker said about what we do in here for our community. Well done, Axel. As a local member, as a Lanyon local and as Lachy's mum, I hope we can see a pump track in Lanyon for all kids to enjoy into the future. Well done, Axel. Enjoy today.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Leave of absence

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

That leave of absence be granted to Ms Clay for this sitting day due to caring.

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

That leave of absence be granted to Mr Steel for this sitting day due to illness.

Deputy Chief Minister—government priorities—update Ministerial statement

MS BERRY (Ginninderra—Deputy Chief Minister, Minister for Education and Early Childhood, Minister for Homes, Homelessness and New Suburbs and Minister for Sport and Recreation) (10.25): One year into the term, I would like to provide an update on the commitments that ACT Labor is achieving and delivering in 2025. Twelve months into this term, we have achieved numerous significant milestones across the Education, Early Childhood, Housing and Homelessness and Sport and Recreation portfolios.

Education and early childhood will always be a priority for the ACT Labor government. Our election commitments for education and early childhood are focused on the delivery of equity and excellence and providing students with the support that they need when they need it. One of our earliest commitments delivered was the provision of free school camps to Birrigai. No student should have to miss out on a school camp because of cost. By the end of this year, more than 4,000 primary school students will have attended this free camp, and I look forward to hearing more about the camps students are going on in 2026 and beyond.

This government is also proud to introduce the Equity Fund, which provides financial support to families to help cover costs of uniforms, excursions, sporting equipment, sporting activities and music lessons. For eligible families, it provides one-off payments for the school year of \$400 for preschool students, \$500 for primary school students and \$750 for high school and college students. The 2025-26 ACT budget allocated an additional \$600,000 to accommodate an additional 1,000 students who are accessing the Equity Fund.

We are delivering on Strong Foundations, our system-wide program that will boost literacy and numeracy outcomes across all of the ACT's public schools. We have invested in our teachers with professional learning and backed them to succeed by investing in evidence-informed classroom materials and resources for every K to 6 classroom.

The ACT government is also delivering on its commitment to expand opportunities for young women in construction through the Try a Trade program. A \$1.4 million investment over four years will double the program's reach to 10 public schools, giving more year 8 to 10 students early exposure to the construction industry through both classroom learning as well as hands-on experience.

At the 2024 election we committed to undertake an audit across all ACT public schools to inform the allocation of \$30 million in upgrades to heating and cooling across the public schools. Once this audit is complete, we can move on to the delivery phase and see these upgrades start and roll out where they are most needed. In line with our commitments, we have conducted a study on interest and capacity to conduct Punjabi and Hindi language teaching in our schools. The listening report from that process will be released soon. Also, of course, we continue to work towards our commitment of increasing the hours available to families in ACT's universal free three-year-old

preschool program. The ACT government also continues to provide free Chromebooks to students, ensuring every child has access to the tools that they need to learn.

Additionally, we have continued to uplift and improve school infrastructure. Consultation with the school community is now complete on the Majura Primary School modernisation project. Planning is underway for the expansion and modernisation of Telopea Park High School as well as Garran Primary School. Construction of the new Design, Arts, Technology and Science, DATS, building at Narrabundah College is progressing well and is on track for completion in early 2027. Construction is progressing for the new Strathnairn Primary School and early childhood education and care centre. Stage 1, which includes the early childhood education and care preschool, administration, one learning community, car park and landscaping, will be complete in early 2026. The new primary school and early childhood education and care service in Whitlam has been designed to meet future enrolment needs, with a staged construction approach ensuring readiness for day one, term 1 in 2027.

The ACT government is committed to ensuring that every child has the best start and is supported to thrive in childhood and throughout their lives. We have been piloting a three-year-old development check in early childhood education and care services as well as Koori Preschools. This pilot aims to identify children's development needs and, where risks or delays are identified, connect children and families with relevant supports and services.

The work of improving our already great public education system and setting children up for lifelong learning and success continues, and I look forward to continuing this work in the years to come.

The ACT government is also making significant progress in the housing and homelessness space. The ACT government began this term with a clear commitment to deliver 5,000 additional public, community and affordable rental homes by 2030. This target is central to the government's broader housing strategy to increase housing supply, access and choice for all Canberrans.

One of the ways the ACT government is doing the increasing of housing supply, access and choice for all Canberrans is through the Affordable Housing Project Fund, which was increased to \$100 million in the 2025-26 budget. This fund is supporting many community housing provider led projects that will help fill the gap for Canberrans on lower incomes who do not meet the eligibility for public housing but are under stress in the private market.

There are many exciting developments underway and some fantastic ones in the pipeline. In July, I was happy to celebrate with MyHome the launch of its long-awaited project in Curtin. This development will see 83 affordable rental units and 15 supported housing apartments for people with enduring mental illness. Just last month, I joined PCYC, CHC and the Snow Foundation in marking the start of demolition for their social and affordable project in Turner to deliver 55 new social and affordable rental homes. In this budget, the government has also announced its support for SEARMS, an Aboriginal community-controlled organisation, to develop a site in Gungahlin for affordable housing. I am also excited to see new community housing providers setting up in the ACT. Organisations such as Housing Plus and Assemble, both of which are

getting affordable housing projects up and running in Taylor and Belconnen respectively, will add essential diversity and choice to the affordable housing market in our city.

Build-to-Rent is also playing a growing role in diversifying our rental market, with projects supported by the ACT government and private developments incorporating a percentage of affordable housing as part of a mixed tenure model. The ACT government is also working on future Build-to-Rent sites in Gungahlin and Molonglo, which will follow the same model with at least 15 per cent of homes offered at below-market rent. The ACT government's investment in public housing is also paying dividends, with 815 dwellings built and 209 dwellings purchased through the Growing and Renewing Public Housing Program. That is not to mention the further 193 homes currently under construction and 19 homes in design and planning phases.

Mr Speaker, as you know, the ACT government is also working closely with the commonwealth government to make the most of the funding that they have available to support new social housing. In July this year, we were pleased to learn that 85 of the dwellings the ACT government submitted for the Housing Australia Future Fund round 2 were successful. The Multi-Unit Property Insourcing Trial has proven successful, with the ACT government expanding property maintenance to 10 multi-unit properties as of June 2025. Additionally, we are assessing domestic violence upgrades and disability modifications. This year we also doubled the Public Housing Tenant Participation Grants. The \$140,000 boost in funding helps members of the Canberra community take part in activities that enhance wellbeing and add enjoyment to their daily lives.

All of these initiatives reflect a strong start and a clear trajectory toward meeting our housing commitments, through sustained investment and policy collaboration across the sector.

We are also investing in sport and recreation to ensure that all Canberrans can safely access sports in Canberra. Female-friendly pavilion upgrades were completed at Aranda District Playing Fields and O'Connor District Playing Fields. This included an updated and inclusive pavilion at Aranda as well as upgrades at O'Connor with a new toilet block, a cricket curator's shed and the conversion of old storage areas into accessible unisex toilet stalls.

In seeking to further support women's participation in sports, we have also implemented the Women's Coaching and Officiating Support Program to support the development of women and girls and coaches and officials at both the elite and community level. The application process is now complete, and I am pleased to report that the recipients will be announced shortly. We have also significantly increased funding for the UC Capitals and Canberra United, supporting both teams in their upcoming 2025-26 seasons.

Lighting upgrades were completed at Stirling Enclosed Oval, Holt Enclosed Oval and Deakin District Playing Fields, improving safety and extending usage hours. Lights were upgraded to the class V cricket standard, enabling Cricket ACT to expand the Women's T20 competition to evening fixtures. Lighting upgrades have commenced at Gordon and Waramanga district playing fields and, this month, portable grandstands

were installed at Gordon 1 District Playing Fields, enhancing spectator experience and supporting community sport events. Cricket infrastructure was strengthened, with upgrades to nets at Deakin District Playing Fields as well as Aranda District Playing Fields. I am proud of the achievements made to improve sporting facilities in Canberra and also to ensure that all Canberrans have access to sport and recreation.

We have achieved some significant milestones across the early childhood education and care service sector, whilst continuing to pave the way for a home for every person who calls Canberra home. We are just getting started, one year in, and I look forward to updating the Assembly in a years time on everything that ACT Labor can achieve and has achieved in two years of the government.

I present the following paper:

Achievements of the 1st year of the term—Ministerial statement, 22 October 2025.

I move:

That the Assembly take note of the paper.

MISS NUTTALL (Brindabella) (10.36): I would like to speak briefly to this statement in my capacity as the ACT Greens spokesperson for education, sports and recreation. The minister speaks about having committed to an audit of ACT public school infrastructure for heating and cooling at the last election. No doubt she did, as did every major party—as did we. But a lot of work to understand the infrastructure challenges and the relevant recommendations underpinning that much-needed comprehensive infrastructure audit came from the tripartisan Education and Community Inclusion Committee last term and the two inquiries into school infrastructure that they conducted. I think their work deserves recognition here. Similarly, it would be remiss of me not to get on the record that the ACT Greens also brought an ambitious policy for increasing universal access to early childhood education and care to the last few elections.

I appreciate the work that the minister has done in the sports space, but I wish to speak about the single biggest issue raised with me by sports stakeholders, which is that we do not have a long-term infrastructure planning process for sports. We do not have a comprehensive audit of demand and supply of sports facilities across all new, emerging and well-established sports. Every sporting body feels like they are competing with every other sporting body for each project, from new infrastructure to the most essential upkeep funding.

I and the Greens have asked for a comprehensive facilities management plan on their behalf many times now, and its absence is inexplicable to me. Giving the various sporting bodies a timeline for when they will get the infrastructure funding that they need will help them with long-term planning and help ease the sentiment that all funding in sports is a competition. It should not be. I want to see sporting organisations able to save their time and money on lobbying and just get on with the games they love.

We are dealing with a volunteer crisis, where every organisation that relies on volunteers is crying out for help. The government's inaction in this space has led to

some of those essential volunteers spending their time coming into the Assembly here to try and beg for funding or support from the various MLAs here or the same federally. We have sports groups that are spending their own money on planning and estimates for projects they think would benefit the community. That should be, at least partly, the job for us and the public service, as much as I deeply respect the advocacy done by sporting groups.

The lack of long-term infrastructure planning that has been happening under this government is deeply disappointing. The survey last term for sporting infrastructure priorities was a good start, and I think that some of that necessary work has been done. However, I certainly hope that, one year into this term, the minister does feel that it is time to reconsider the issue and fully commit to the long-term planning that the sector is calling for.

MS CARRICK (Murrumbidgee) (10.39): I am shocked that the minister is proud of her achievements to improve sporting facilities. If you do not have them, how can you improve them? The privatisation of sporting facilities to allow the diminishing of the Phillip Pool to be a 25 metre pool in a Geocon Tower and now seeing a concept plan coming through from the Scentre Group to have basketball courts on the fourth storey, crammed into a community area in a new Westfield is deeply disappointing. There is no plan for sporting infrastructure in this town, and it is about time that there was—to meet the needs of our community, so that we can support our young people to come together so that we can nurture them and their relationships.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Oaks Estate Strategic Plan—government response

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) (10.40): On 6 May 2025, the Assembly passed a motion to develop a five-year strategic plan for Oaks Estate in consultation with the community to help address concerns raised by the residents. Following comprehensive engagement with the Oaks Estate community, today I present the Oaks Estate Strategic Plan 2025-2030 to the Assembly, a plan designed to improve safety, wellbeing and community in Oaks Estate.

In tabling the plan, I would like to extend my sincere thanks to the Oaks Estate community and every resident who shared their views and experiences and advocated for action in their suburb. I would also like to acknowledge the support of the Oaks Estate Residents Association and St Vincent de Paul during this consultation period and the work of both groups to make sure we heard as many voices as possible.

Over the six-week community consultation period, from 14 July to 24 August, officials from across various ACT government directorates met with more than 10 per cent of the Oaks Estate community at drop-in sessions. Many more responded to online surveys and shared their views and experiences with us online. The consultation process was designed to ensure that residents' lived experiences, priorities and ideas directly shaped the actions that are described in the plan that I am tabling today.

A listening report details what we heard during the consultation period and was published on the YourSay website on 18 September 2025. The most powerful message we heard during the consultation was the strong sense of community within Oaks Estate, with residents knowing and looking out for one another. The plan seeks to harness this strength and acknowledge the value of community connections.

The plan is based on the key themes that emerged during the original debate on the motion and from the advocacy of local residents—being housing, safety, places and spaces, transport, health and education. The plan outlines how the ACT government will build on existing services and programs it provides directly or funds community organisations to provide. As called on by my motion, the plan takes a multiagency approach and sets up ongoing governance arrangements over five years so that, together with the community, we will continue to work on delivering improved safety, wellbeing and connectedness.

The ACT government provides services directly and funds community service organisations that work within the Oaks Estate community. Everyone wants the best outcomes for their suburb, and Oaks Estate is no exception. I would like to take the chance again to thank the Oaks Estate community for the time they have taken to share their views and concerns with me and the government.

Across the government, we have identified immediate and short-term actions that we will take to better support the community in accessing existing services. As the members of this chamber have said, there is not one simple solution that will fix everything and not every issue can be resolved quickly. One of the short-term actions in the plan is to establish a pilot working group that brings frontline service delivery agencies together to focus on opportunities and to address safety—a key concern which was raised in the consultation.

The ACT recognises the importance of social inclusion and acknowledges it as a social determinant of health. This working group will support social inclusion for the Oaks Estate community. The plan also outlines a range of opportunities for community-led activities and initiatives that the Oaks Estate community may wish to explore to support social inclusion in their neighbourhood.

An executive working group was established to develop the plan, and it will continue to oversee its implementation over the next five years. It will meet with the Oaks Estate Residents Association twice a year to hear feedback and monitor the effectiveness of implemented actions. It will also prepare annual progress reports, which will be provided to the Legislative Assembly each year for the life of this plan.

I look forward to the future of Oaks Estate and updating the Assembly on the implementation of the plan. I commend the plan to the Assembly.

I present the following papers:

Oaks Estate Strategic Plan—2025-2030, undated.

Assembly resolution of 6 May 2025—Government response—Ministerial statement, 22 October 2025.

I move:

That the Assembly take note of the ministerial statement.

MS LEE (Kurrajong) (10.44): I thank the minister for her statement. As the minister mentioned, back in May of this year, the Assembly unanimously supported a motion brought jointly by myself, Mr Rattenbury and Mr Emerson. This motion was developed following meetings with Fiona MacGregor and representatives from the Oaks Estate Residents Group as well as the broader Oaks Estate community and stakeholders, who were frustrated about the lack of action by this government to address some of the issues of concern that had been raised by multiple local members over many, many years.

As I have said in this place before, the residents of Oaks Estate rightly feel that they have been forgotten by this ACT Labor government. For years, they have been forced to deal with issues and a lack of basic government services that Canberrans in other parts of our territory just would not accept. So the motion that I and my fellow non-executive Kurrajong members brought to the Assembly earlier this year was borne out of a complete frustration over years and years of neglect by this Labor government.

But I do recognise that the government, whose hand was forced by our motion, has engaged in a consultation process in good faith. I attended one of the public consultation sessions, and it was pleasing to chat with officials from various directorates who had a genuine desire to listen to the residents of Oaks Estate and to hear firsthand their concerns and frustrations. I put on the record a thanks to each and every one of those officials who participated and facilitated those public consultation sessions, as well as, of course, a thank you to the residents of Oaks Estate who engaged so completely with that consultation process. I also acknowledge the members of St Vincent de Paul, who were also very engaged in that process.

Of course, as is often the case with this government, the devil is in the detail. While I welcome the tabling of the strategic plan just now, having not seen the plan of course prior to it being tabled, I am obviously not able to comment on the specific measures contained in that plan. I am sure that I will have more to say on this topic once I have had a chance to read through it.

But what I will say in closing, though, is that, having been largely ignored by this Labor government for years and years, the residents of Oaks Estate will not settle for lip-service, they will not settle for empty promises and they will not settle for pushing the issues down the road—and, as one of their local members, neither will I.

MR EMERSON (Kurrajong) (10.47): I thank the minister for delivering this statement today, and I very much look forward to reading the plan—as I am sure Ms Lee and Mr Rattenbury do. I want to acknowledge and thank them for their collaborative work in bringing this matter to the Assembly on behalf of residents. It really was a pleasure working together to focus on what matters to people in our electorate. I look forward to pursuing more opportunities to do similar things through other parts of Kurrajong.

I also want to thank Minister Berry and her office for prepping this up and also the government officials who have carried this forward. Like Ms Lee, I went out to one of the consultations and spoke with some of the officials about what they were hearing

from residents, and I was really pleased with how the consultation was being run in such an inclusive way that made it easy for residents to engage. Of course, members of the community like Fiona MacGregor and also the team at Vinnies played a role in encouraging more people to come along and participate. But I thought it was being run really well and I enjoyed hearing some of the reflections from government officials that they were hearing from residents.

One resident had mentioned that they had had similar consultations in the past and really hoped that this one led to action. So I look forward to looking at the plan, and I am happy to hear about the governance arrangements in place to ensure that both the plan is being revisited and discussed with residents over the course of its duration and also that we get reporting back to the Assembly so that we can ensure that it really is delivering the impact that it aims to deliver.

Again, I want to acknowledge Fiona MacGregor and Bronwyn Spackman, particularly, from the Oaks Estate Residents Association for their relentless advocacy on issues that are relevant to their community and for engaging proactively with all the members of Kurrajong in respect of this issue. I also want to acknowledge Colin Walters and Anne Forrest, from the Inner South Canberra Community Council, and really thank them for backing the Oaks Estate Residents Association and the community more broadly on this issue and many others. I thank the team at Vinnies for all their work in Oaks Estate. I also, again, acknowledge the government officials who were involved, for their candour in discussing the matter with me.

I very much look forward to reading the plan. But, much more importantly, I look forward to seeing it delivered and seeing some real positive change for a community that has been forgotten for a long time.

MR RATTENBURY (Kurrajong) (10.49): I just have a few brief remarks. I was pleased to work with Ms Lee and Mr Emerson to bring this motion before the Assembly to reflect concerns being expressed by the Oaks Estate community. I welcome the minister's statement today and the tabling of the plan. Similarly, I have not had a chance to have a look at yet, but it has now been tabled and we will go through it in a bit of detail.

I am pleased the government has met the timeline from the original motion and now we have an ongoing reporting process before the Assembly. That will, I think, help us all keep focused on this issue for a community that has felt neglected at times, and we need to make sure we really follow through on this plan.

While I have not seen the actual strategic plan, I thought the listening report that was released by the government a couple of months ago was a good insight into the perspectives of the community. Right at the front of that report it talks about the key themes in the order of priorities ranked by response to the online survey. Those were: first, safety; second, housing; third, places and spaces; fourth, transport; fifth, health; and sixth, education. It gives you a sense of the priorities and the concerns that the community holds. The listening report goes into some detail as to what the concerns were. I think they reflect matters that were in the original motion and also in the correspondence that we have all, as Kurrajong members, received from the community. There are quite a few in there. I am sure that the strategic plan will address those various

areas, and I look forward to seeing the responses.

One thing I want to touch on is the use of the community hall. It is a real institution in Oaks Estate. The YourSay commentary talked about community comments about it being a real potential hub for local events and gatherings. In a community like Oaks State, which does feel isolated for its residents at times, that opportunity for community gathering and having their own space, like a community hall—particularly in the absence of other things, like a shopping centre and the like, which is not realistic for Oaks Estate because of its size—is particularly important. I really hope we can find a solution to make that more available for the community. They talk about the need to have to drive all the way to a government shopfront to get the key and the expense of hiring it. I think those are real barriers, and I hope that we can find a solution to that. That is not to take away from the other issues, but I think it is the sort of thing that is an easier win that will have a ripple effect, if supported, in the community in a substantive way.

MS STEPHEN-SMITH (Kurrajong—Minister for Health, Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Finance and Minister for the Public Service) (10.52): Very briefly, I rise to add my voice as a member for Kurrajong and on behalf of the Chief Minister as well to reiterate the thanks of all of the other members for Kurrajong to the community. It was a pleasure to meet with Fiona when these issues were raised and to talk through some of the challenges. It was not the first time, by any stretch, that I had sat down with Oaks Estate residents to talk through the issues occurring in their community, which do tend to come and go. I want to thank Minister Berry for leading the whole-of-government work to deliver this strategy for the Oaks Estate community. I think it will make a tangible difference to them.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Minister for Health—government priorities—update Ministerial statement

MS STEPHEN-SMITH (Kurrajong—Minister for Health, Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Finance and Minister for the Public Service) (10.53): As we all know, Sunday marked one year since the 2024 ACT election. ACT Labor contested the election armed with a platform of practical and progressive ideas for our community and a proven record of delivering real outcomes for Canberrans. The community and the Assembly endorsed ACT Labor to form government and deliver that vision. One year in, this is a good opportunity to update the Assembly on the government's achievements in the health and mental health portfolios. A key focus of our 2024 platform was keeping Canberra healthy by investing in accessible public health care. We promised to undertake the territory's largest-ever investment in health infrastructure continuing to deliver new and expanded hospitals and local health centres. We promised high quality public health care closer to home.

One year in, we are working hard to deliver. We have commenced construction on the new South Tuggeranong Health Centre in Conder and remain on track for completion in mid-2026. The project is progressing with concrete foundations now complete and structural framing well underway. This stage involves establishing the building's core framework which will support upcoming works including external cladding, internal

fit-out and installation of essential services.

We have started the formal planning process for the Inner South Health Centre in Griffith, in my own electorate of Kurrajong. We will provide access to a range of healthcare services including oral health, pathology collection, post-acute care management, rapid access clinics and chronic disease management services. A territory priority project declaration request has been lodged for the Inner South Health Centre. If approved, this will exempt the development application from a third-party appeal. It will provide greater certainty that this important community facility can be delivered without delay.

A draft major plan amendment has also been released for this site by the Territory Planning Authority. This amendment proposes changing the area from a PRZ1 urban open space zone and PRZ2 restricted access recreation zone to a CFZ community facility zone. Public consultation on the territory priority project and draft major plan amendment closes on 19 November 2025. Following the outcome of the TPP declaration request and the major plan amendment process, Infrastructure Canberra will progress to a development application.

We are also getting underway with developing the design for the North Gungahlin Health Centre on Kingsland Parade near Casey market town. The centre will include flexible spaces to support a range of services. The final list of services will be confirmed as planning continues.

We are also continuing to deliver generational investments in hospital infrastructure, modernising the Canberra Hospital and building a new hospital on the north side. Design, planning and consultation are well underway for the Northside Hospital project. The masterplan and concept design are being finalised for the main works business case submission in early 2026. More than 200 staff have been consulted on early designs. Early works are also progressing, with the construction of the replacement Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service facility kicking off in early 2026 and plans to commence enabling and services works on the Bruce campus in the second quarter of 2026.

The Northside Hospital project team has explored the planning and design requirements for the new birth centre, with a range of options explored. Several options have been developed in the current master planning that include key design objectives such as a discrete entrance and demarcated zones for a more homely design, as well as all-weather access between the birth centre and services to escalate care if required, such as theatres. The co-design consultation with the Maternity in Focus stakeholders is expected to commence in late 2025. This is an important element of our commitment to the new hospital and one I am pleased is progressing well.

At Canberra Hospital the new Yamba Drive entrance was recently completed, delivering the final element of the Canberra Hospital Expansion. While this major project is now formally complete, we will continue to implement the Canberra Hospital Master Plan. This work is occurring in phases to ensure operational continuity with minimal disruption to the clinical, support and administrative functions delivered on the campus. This requires progressive decommissioning and demolition of infrastructure and development of modern, fit for purpose assets across the campus. Infrastructure

Canberra is continuing with planning for the next stage of the master plan. As part of this work Infrastructure Canberra has undertaken a range of investigations into interim parking solutions at the Canberra Hospital. Planning and design work is progressing on increasing staff parking in line with the 2025-26 budget commitment and construction is expected to commence in mid-2026.

Our focus on growing and strengthening the public health system is about more than building the 21st century health infrastructure Canberrans rightly expect. We are also investing in attracting, training and retaining the best health professionals. We are implementing phase 2 of our mandated minimum nurse and midwife to patient ratios across Canberra Health Services. Ratios are now in place across emergency departments, intensive care, coronary care, cancer services, Clare Holland House, perioperative services, maternity services, neonatal intensive care and special care nurseries. The final areas to implement ratios will be subacute mental health and subacute rehabilitation units, which will occur from February 2026. This means that from February, all inpatient units across our public health service will work under the ratio framework. We have delivered on our commitment to implementing ratios across Canberra Health Services' inpatient units.

We are working with our medical staff and integrated operations centre to improve the efficiency of our public hospitals, work that has delivered significant improvements in emergency department performance, patient flow across our hospitals and care planning. Efficient theatre use, elective surgery and outpatients are current areas of focus in our hospitals. None of this is easy and sometimes it requires cultural change in addition to the use of technology and shared decision-making. We are committed to undertaking this work in a collaborative way and I want to again thank the many specialists who have engaged positively in these conversations.

We have also been engaging with health practitioners and professionals across our community-based services as we plan for the delivery of new facilities. This includes looking at improvements to CHS community care, opportunities to expand virtual care and work with our partners in primary and community health services. We are working with GPs to co-design the Professional Development and Wellbeing Fund and our new bulk-billing incentives. And the Chief Psychiatrist is actively working to support GPs' ability to diagnose and treat ADHD because we want all health professionals working at their full scope of practice.

That is also why just last week I announced the expanded scope for ACT community pharmacists to make it more convenient for families with young children to get vaccinated next year. We are also working to enable pharmacists to be able to treat some of the most common conditions people come to pharmacies with, starting with embedding the work on uncomplicated UTIs and resupply of oral contraception, followed by certain skin conditions and then expanding to mild acute musculoskeletal pain, gastroesophageal reflux disease, allergic and non-allergic rhinitis, acne and acute nausea and vomiting. Pharmacists will be authorised to offer this treatment only after meeting postgraduate training requirements.

Over recent months, a lot of work has also been underway to support the implementation of voluntary assisted dying services so that they can commence from 3 November 2025. This has been an enormous effort, which I discussed in detail in the

last sitting period. Thank you again to the officials, partners and stakeholders who have contributed to this work.

We have also harmonised our regulation of e-cigarettes with other jurisdictions and will be significantly strengthening enforcement arrangements for illicit tobacco through legislation I will introduce today. We are delivering the ACT Drug Strategy Action Plan 2022-2026 and continuing to lead the nation with a harm minimisation approach to alcohol, tobacco, illicit drugs and non-medical use of pharmaceuticals.

Finally, we have commenced the next round of enterprise bargaining with our public service, with the goal of continuing to provide the pay and conditions that attract Canberrans from all walks of life to contribute back to their community through the ACT public service.

Mr Speaker, these are just some of our achievements over the last 12 months. Of all the parties and independents represented in this place, it is fair to say ACT Labor presented the most comprehensive vision to the community in 2024. It was a bold vision, but achievable. It was one we developed, not with the intent of putting a slogan on a flyer, but as a genuine platform that we knew we could push to deliver in government. And we are delivering, and we will continue to deliver.

I present the following paper:

Achievements of the 1st year of the term—Ministerial statement, 22 October 2025.

I move:

That the Assembly take note of the paper.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Children's Week Ministerial statement

MR PETTERSSON (Yerrabi—Minister for Business, Arts and Creative Industries, Minister for Children, Youth and Families, Minister for Multicultural Affairs and Minister for Skills, Training and Industrial Relations) (11.03): I rise today during Children's Week to reaffirm our commitment to the rights and wellbeing of children and young people across the ACT. The week provides a valuable opportunity to raise awareness of the unique needs of children and to celebrate the role of government in supporting every child to reach their full potential. Children's rights are enshrined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and form the foundation of our commitment to supporting children's wellbeing from birth to adulthood.

The 2025 Children's Week theme is "Everyone Should Know About Children's Rights." It highlights our shared responsibility for upholding and promoting the rights of children, including by supporting them in every aspect of their lives, from education and health to promoting culture, safety and participation. The ACT government proudly funds ACT Children's Week activities through the Community Development Program. This year the ACT Children's Week Grants Program is supporting 139 events and

activities across the territory, with an emphasis on rights education, community wellbeing, intergenerational engagement, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural understanding, STEM and access to child-focused resources.

Of course, our commitment to supporting the wellbeing of children and young people extends beyond our celebration of Children's Week. The ACT government is working across portfolios to deliver a range of strategies and plans, demonstrating that upholding and promoting the interests of children requires whole-of-government effort. The Best Start for Canberra's Children: The First 1,000 Days Strategy is dedicated to improving outcomes for children and families from conception to a child's second birthday. This is a critical time for establishing the long-term physical, cognitive, social, emotional, health and wellbeing of a child as the brain and body undergo the most important stages of development. This government is currently delivering the phase 1 action plan, which was launched in 2024, and phase 2 will commence in July 2026.

Set Up for Success: An Early Childhood Strategy for the ACT highlights how early learning matters and must be prioritised. It recognises that every child deserves access to high quality education and the lifelong opportunities that stem from it. Next Steps for Our Kids 2022-2030 sets the roadmap for work in children, youth and families and partner agencies to ensure children and young people grow up safe, strong and connected. Next Steps aims to offer greater support in the early stages to strengthen families and reform child, youth, and family services.

We are also delivering on the ACT government's election commitment to continue the work of the Child and Family Network. Since inception, ACT government directorates have worked together to identify gaps and opportunities for integrated, culturally competent and holistic support services. Further work will be done over the course of the next 12 months to position the network where it can have the most impact.

This year saw a significant step to better respond to vulnerable children and young people at risk of engagement with the criminal justice system. We lead the nation by raising the minimum age of criminal responsibility to 14. This reform is a major step toward improving the health, safety and wellbeing of children by providing them with therapeutic and coordinated services, including the Therapeutic Support Panel for Children and Young People and the Safer Youth Response Service. Both provide tailored therapeutic interventions and wraparound care for children and families. These reforms go to strengthening the child, youth and family services system by promoting earlier, culturally safe interventions that prevent harmful behaviours and youth offending. This will hopefully lead to better outcomes and be tangible ways we can address some of the measures related to children and young people through the Closing the Gap agreement.

I would also like to acknowledge the unfortunate reality that there are some children who are not thriving in the way they should be. This was most clearly detailed through the 2024 Australian Early Development Census results. As detailed by Minister Berry yesterday, these results show an increase in developmental vulnerability both nationally and in the ACT which is deeply concerning. This is something the government is committed to examining and addressing and I look forward to working with Minister Berry and my other colleagues on this important work.

On a more upbeat note, this week I had the privilege to visit a Learn, Giggle and Grow playgroup at the Gungahlin Child and Family Centre to celebrate Children's Week with children and their parents. It was wonderful to see all the families connecting and engaging in activities that help to support their wellbeing. I had the immense honour of meeting Hephner the alpaca who is quite famous for his charity work across Canberra.

I am also looking forward to visiting PlayFEST run by ACT Playgroups on Friday, where I hope to meet with more families that benefit from sharing time together. These playgroups are just one of the many programs delivered through our Child and Family Centres which have become cornerstones of community support. These centres provide welcoming, child-friendly services for children up to eight years of age and their families, with a focus on parenting support, playgroups, home visiting programs, specialist clinical services and dedicated programs for multicultural families and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children up to 12 years of age. We have centres in Tuggeranong, West Belconnen and Gungahlin and have committed to building a fourth Child and Family Centre in the Molonglo region to meet the growing demand.

The ACT government also funds a range of services and supports which provide families with a safe and supportive environment to build connections within their local community. The Children's Services Program provides free, short-term early childhood education and care placements for children facing significant challenges. This includes placements for children experiencing domestic or family violence, homelessness, traumatic events, or children living with a parent or carer who needs some additional help. The ACT government provides annual funding of \$2 million to eight partner agencies, supporting 48 weekly placements across Canberra. These fully-funded placements offer vital support during times of real vulnerability.

The Child, Youth and Family Services Program supports children, young people and families across the ACT through services delivered via four regional networks. The program has a focus on safety and wellbeing, identity and support and community connection. The CYFSP currently funds 23 organisations with over \$15.8 million annually. It delivers a range of supports including case management, parenting support, therapeutic services, youth engagement, playgroups, groups programs and integrated models.

I also want to note that 2025 marked a pivotal year for the implementation of the ACT Child Safe Standards Scheme. The Standards seek to advance child safety including by raising awareness of the importance of children's rights, safety and wellbeing. This year we funded training on the ACT Child Safe Standards, helping to strengthen child-safe practices and embed a culture of safety across the sector. These are just some of the many initiatives and investments that this government has put in place and are always developed with children and young people front of mind.

And as such, the ACT government is deeply committed to listening to the voices of children and young people, particularly those experiencing the highest levels of disadvantage, ensuring their perspectives help shape future policies and programs. One mechanism is through the ACT Youth Advisory Council and the ACT Youth Assembly. These forums bring together diverse voices aged 12 to 25 to discuss key issues such as education, health and housing. Seeing firsthand the incredible information collected through the Assembly has prompted me to call for them to be held annually, to make

sure we can capture, and act on, the voices of young people as regularly as possible. I also recently announced the development of the youth justice strategic plan which will inform development of the broader youth strategy that we committed to at the election. I look forward to the coming 12 months to see how we can best position the plan to create lasting and effective change.

Madam Assistant Speaker, in conclusion, there is much that has been done, and much still to do, for our children and young people. Children's Week is a time to celebrate the rights of children to grow, learn and thrive in safe and supportive environments. It is a celebration of what makes childhood special and a reminder of our responsibility to protect and nurture it.

I present the following paper:

Children's Week—Ministerial statement, 22 October 2025.

I move:

That the Assembly take note of the paper.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Order of the day—postponement

Ordered that order of the day Assembly Business No 1 be postponed until a later day.

Order of the day—postponement

Ordered that order of the day Executive Business No 1 be postponed until a later day.

Leave of absence

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

That leave of absence be granted to Ms Castley for this sitting day for personal reasons.

Tobacco and Other Smoking Products Amendment Bill 2025

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

Title read by Clerk.

MS STEPHEN-SMITH (Kurrajong—Minister for Health, Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Finance and Minister for the Public Service) (11.15): I move:

That this bill be agreed to in principle.

I rise today to present the Tobacco and Other Smoking Products Amendment Bill 2025.

The bill seeks to make amendments to the Tobacco and Other Smoking Products Act 1927 and the Magistrates Court (Tobacco and Other Smoking Products Infringement Notices) Regulation 2010, to explicitly prohibit the sale or possession of illicit tobacco by a licensed tobacco retailer under territory legislation, and strengthen the enforcement options available to authorised officers under the Tobacco and Other Smoking Products Act.

On 8 April 2025, the Legislative Assembly passed the Tobacco and Other Smoking Products (Vaping Goods) Amendment Act 2025. Those amendments broadened the scope of the Tobacco and Other Smoking Products Act by including e-cigarettes as prohibited smoking products, aligning with the commonwealth vaping reforms and establishing the basis for a regulatory framework to combat illicit e-cigarettes trade in the ACT. Alongside the ACT's well established smoking product licensing scheme, the Vaping Goods Amendments Bill established a complementary framework for e-cigarettes. As I indicated in April, I am pleased to deliver further reform that will enable stronger powers to regulate tobacco in the ACT.

This bill also directly addresses the Assembly resolution of 17 September 2025, which called on the government to pursue legislative changes to strengthen enforcement capacity and introduce stronger penalties for the sale of illicit tobacco and vaping products in the ACT. As noted at that time, the ACT government has been monitoring the reported increases in the availability of illicit tobacco in Australia. Illicit tobacco and nicotine products are produced or imported into Australia illegally to avoid tax, excise and other regulatory controls. This presents a risk of increased involvement from serious and organised crime groups trading in illicit tobacco and prohibited smoking products.

While illicit tobacco is illegal at the federal level, it is presently not prohibited under the Tobacco and Other Smoking Products Act, which limits local enforcement options. The bill complements the Vaping Goods Amendment Bill by clarifying and modernising the existing requirements and powers under the Tobacco and Other Smoking Products Act to improve regulatory outcomes. The bill amends the definition of a prohibited smoking product to include illicit tobacco, expanding enforcement powers to capture this growing illicit market.

It will also provide authorised officers with proportionate and escalating regulatory tools designed to achieve compliance, and to target wilful disregard of regulatory requirements.

Regularly reviewing local enforcement powers is important in responding to changes in the tobacco and other smoking products market—in this case, to address the growing availability of illicit and potentially more harmful smoking products.

Increased accessibility of illicit tobacco may increase tobacco use, see more people developing addiction, and even result in accidental poisoning.

Further, while the illicit tobacco trade remains profitable, it will remain attractive to organised crime—increasing the risk of violence in the territory. While ACT Policing is aware that organised crime is associated with some tobacconists interstate, they have advised that they not seen evidence of serious organised crime involvement with ACT

tobacconists.

While ACT Policing continues to monitor the situation closely, it is notable that the ACT differs from New South Wales and Victoria in having a longstanding retail tobacco licensing scheme in place. This bill seeks to strengthen that scheme by introducing effective graduated enforcement mechanisms, including infringement notices and improved seizure powers, in addition to supporting better regulation of smoking products more generally.

In short, this bill will grant authorised officers modernised powers of entry, and allow the issue of infringement notices related to the commercial possession and sale of prohibited smoking products—including vaping goods and illicit tobacco. Currently, authorised officers may only enter premises suspected of selling prohibited smoking products under a warrant, or with the consent of the owner. This bill will expand this to enable entry to any premises that are open to the public, or in response to a “serious or urgent public health emergency”. Infringement notices are notices that can be served where an authorised officer believes a breach of the Tobacco and Other Smoking Products Act has occurred. An infringement notice can be discharged by payment of the penalty unit amount, which is \$1,600 under the bill, or by challenging the notice in the Magistrates Court. Infringement notices are an efficient, inexpensive alternative to prosecution and a well-understood regulatory tool for the resolution of noncompliance. The inclusion of infringement notice provisions for the sale of vaping goods and illicit tobacco reflects the potential harms associated with this activity, and is considered reasonable and proportionate.

Additionally, the bill will allow the government to seize illegal goods from retailers and to retain and destroy them in a wider range of circumstances. Currently, goods seized during inspections need to be returned to their owner unless a prosecution commences within three months and the person is found guilty of the offence involving the seized goods. This does not serve the new purpose of the Tobacco and Other Smoking Products Act, which is to directly reduce the availability of prohibited and illicit goods. This bill reflects the ACT government’s commitment to tackling the increasing problem of illicit tobacco.

In addition to working closely with the commonwealth and other jurisdictions, we are committed to bringing forward further reforms that reflect the serious nature of criminal activity that has been associated with the illicit tobacco trade. Even though the ACT has not observed the same level of organised criminal activity seen in other jurisdictions, we are committed to introducing powers to respond to the illicit trade in tobacco and have asked officials to consider how best to give effect to this objective in the local context. I welcome members’ unanimous support for stronger enforcement laws to target illicit tobacco in debating the motion on 17 September.

In developing this bill, we have also considered potential risks to the privacy and safety of officers undertaking regulatory enforcement. The bill will remove the requirement for an authorised officer to have their name on their ID cards, to better protect our officers and their families. The involvement of organised crime increases the risk of occupational violence against authorised officers. These fears have been reported in other jurisdictions across Australia. The ACT government, under the Work Health and Safety Act 2011, has an obligation to mitigate identified occupational hazards for its

employees. Replacing officers' names with a unique identifying number will reduce the ability for persons or groups who may be aggrieved by the enforcement actions of an authorised officer to retaliate against that officer, while keeping these officers accountable to government. These changes are similar to those being made in other Australian jurisdictions in response to the threat of occupational violence.

This bill declares illicit tobacco—specifically products that do not follow the commonwealth plain packaging requirements in the commonwealth Public Health (Tobacco and Other Products) Act 2023—as “prohibited smoking products”. While illicit tobacco is prohibited at the federal level, prohibition at the territory level allows for authorised officers to use the full range of enforcement powers against those that supply illegal products. This will allow for appropriate and proportionate enforcement against the sale of illicit tobacco itself, as opposed to the way in which tobacco and other smoking products are advertised, displayed or sold.

Aligned with a current focus of the act on protecting children from the aggressive marketing tactics of tobacco companies, a minister may only prohibit the sale of products that, in short, are likely to be attractive to children and young people under the current act. If this bill is supported, any tobacco product that does not comply with the commonwealth Public Health (Tobacco and Other Products) Act 2023 relating to the packaging, naming, appearance of physical features, or content of a tobacco product will be prohibited. Together, these measures will allow authorised officers to take more direct and immediate action against retailers who sell prohibited smoking products and illicit tobacco.

To ensure ACT laws remain up to date with federal controls, the bill also provides that additional products may be declared prohibited by regulation when already banned by the commonwealth. This bill also provides that the supply of a prohibited smoking product is a strict liability offence. Strict liability offences are offences where someone can be found guilty in the absence of any requirement of intention. The use of a strict liability offence is considered appropriate in this regulatory context, where retailers should be well aware of which products they can and cannot legally sell.

For example, the general prohibition of the sale of vapes outside community pharmacy has been widely communicated to retailers. Retailers are also aware of controls on the sale of tobacco products, including restrictions on supply of tobacco products through licensed wholesalers. The application of strict liability allows authorised officers to act swiftly where illicit vape sales are detected, without needing to form a reasonable belief about the seller's knowledge or intention.

Subject to the passage of this bill, any person or business that supplies a prohibited smoking product may now be given an infringement notice of \$1,600 under the Magistrates Court (Tobacco and Other Smoking Products Infringement Notices) Regulation 2010. This addition, along with the strengthened right of entry discussed earlier, will align enforcement powers with contemporary public health legislation, ensuring that authorised officers can act quickly and decisively.

The bill further expands on authorised officers' abilities during an investigation to take measurements, conduct a test, take a sample of anything found on the premises, or to direct an occupier to help the authorised officer. The offence for not taking reasonable

steps to comply with a direction from an authorised officer is 50 penalty units or \$8,000 for an individual and \$40,500 for a corporation.

The new section 41I of the bill requires that a seized thing must be returned to its owner or reasonable compensation paid, except in cases where: a prosecution is finalised with the owner being found guilty of the offence; an infringement notice is served on the owner and not withdrawn; or possession of the thing by the owner would constitute an offence. The expansion of these powers supports the issuing of infringement notices and prevents the return of prohibited smoking products or illicit tobacco, which would clearly be a counterproductive outcome. Instead, seized prohibited smoking products such as vaping goods or illicit tobacco would be able to be permanently seized by the territory and destroyed.

Madam Assistant Speaker, strengthening the regulation to reduce the supply, availability and accessibility of tobacco products, including illicit tobacco, is a priority action of the National Tobacco Strategy 2023-2030. As mentioned earlier, the government is committed to bringing forward further reforms to address the growing concerns about serious criminal conduct associated with the illicit tobacco trade, and this work is currently underway. I am pleased to be delivering this next stage of our tobacco and vaping reforms, which will align with our broader commitment to harm minimisation, with the introduction of this bill to better regulate smoking products in the ACT. I commend the bill to the Assembly.

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

Environment Legislation Amendment Bill 2025

Debate resumed from 7 May 2025, on motion by **Ms Orr**:

That this bill be agreed to in principle.

MR HANSON (Murrumbidgee) (11.28): I only intend to speak briefly to this bill on behalf of Ms Castley, who is unwell today. The opposition have reviewed the legislation, and we have no particular concerns with it. We do, of course, have concerns about some of the problems that came to pass, but not with the fact that they are now being resolved. I note that the environment committee has decided not to undertake an inquiry; and that we have had no contact from stakeholders or others with concerns. We will be supporting this legislation today.

MR RATTENBURY (Kurrajong) (11.28): I rise to speak in support of the Environment Legislation Amendment Bill 2025 on behalf of the Greens. This is an omnibus bill enabling minor legislative amendments to support the work of the government in the climate change, environment, energy and water portfolios. The amendments are minor and technical in nature, and they do clarify existing uncertainties in the legislation, streamline work processes, correct drafting errors, and update wording to align with current drafting practices.

Amendments to the biosecurity legislation allow the territory to be responsive and flexible in addressing biosecurity incidents by incorporating relevant laws, standards or instruments from other jurisdictions with similar biosecurity frameworks as required.

Changes to the Commissioner for Sustainability and the Environment Act 1993 change the timing of the government response to the commissioner's *State of the Environment Report*, to better allow work over the busy Christmas-new year period. This is one we particularly looked at and did seek some advice on. We believe that this extended timeframe is appropriate in this case.

And we also note amendments to the Energy Efficiency (Cost of Living) Improvement Act that will enable the territory to apply technical codes and standards on electricity retailers that are relevant to ensuring retailers comply with the act. There are also a number of other amendments that clarify offences and correct drafting errors, and we note and support these amendments. We think they will be an improvement across these areas of legislation.

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) (11.30), in reply: This bill, as noted by a few people now, is a technical update to legislation within my portfolio responsibility of climate change, environment, energy and water. The bill contains amendments that strengthen the ACT's environmental legislation and ensures our laws remain responsive, modern and aligned with best practice.

The first amendment is the consolidation of provisions from the biosecurity regulations into their head power: the Biosecurity Act 2023—which I will call the Biosecurity Act now; the Biosecurity (National Livestock Identification System) Regulation 2025; and the Biosecurity Regulation 2025. Each contain provisions that allow the ACT to incorporate, apply or adopt a document—for example an interstate law or an Australian standard or an instrument—as is in force from time to time.

The bill consolidates these provisions in the regulations into a single provision into the Biosecurity Act. The new provision also disapplies section 47(5) and 47(6) of the Legislation Act 2001 to allow a regulation or any instrument under the biosecurity framework to incorporate, apply or adopt a document without the requirement to make that document a notifiable instrument. This is a practical and forward-looking change that enhances our ability to respond to biosecurity threats swiftly and effectively, and supports consistency of response across jurisdictions.

The bill also amends the Commissioner for Sustainability and the Environment Act 1993 by slightly adjusting the timing of the government's response to the *State of the Environment Report*. Section 19 of the Commissioner for Sustainability and the Environment Act provides that the minister must present a government response to the *State of the Environment Report* within six months from receiving that report. With the timing of the reporting period, the minister often receives the report in December.

We know that many people, including members of the Assembly, take leave in December. It is accepted nationally that December and January are slower periods for both businesses and governments. This bill is adjusting the timeframe by requiring the government response to be provided six months from the tabling of the *State of the Environment Report* in the Legislative Assembly. It is not unreasonable to adjust this timeframe slightly, to allow public servants to take leave over December and January

and still have a full six months to provide a government response.

Mr Assistant Speaker, the bill inserts a provision into section 25 of the Energy Efficiency (Cost of Living) Improvement Act 2012 to enable codes of practice made under that act to apply, adopt or incorporate laws, Australian standards or other instruments as in force from time to time. This provision also disapplies section 47 of the Legislation Act. This disapplication allows the codes of practice to apply, adopt or incorporate a law, instrument or standard without the requirement to make that law, instrument or standard a notifiable instrument.

Among the amendments in this bill are changes to the Nature Conservation Act 2014—which I will call the Nature Conversation Act—in response to commencement of the Biosecurity Act on 15 May 2025. This legislation gives the minister the authority to declare a biosecurity emergency, or issue a control declaration when a serious incident arises. These declarations are vital tools. They allow us to act swiftly to protect our environment, our agriculture and our community.

But with these powers comes complexity. In some cases, a person following a direction under a biosecurity declaration might inadvertently commit an offence under the Nature Conservation Act. This is not the kind of legal uncertainty we want in times of crisis. This bill addresses that. It inserts new provisions into section 153 of the Nature Conservation Act, creating clear exceptions to the offences in chapter 6 so long as a person is acting under a biosecurity declaration or control order. This is a practical fix, which ensures that people doing the right thing in a biosecurity emergency are not unintentionally committing an offence.

The bill also makes a small but important change to section 325 of the Nature Conservation Act. Currently, section 325 allows a conservation officer to direct someone to leave a reserve if they believe, on reasonable grounds, that the person is in the reserve and has acted offensively, caused a public nuisance or committed an offence. The redraft of this provision clarifies that the conservation officer's reasonable belief applies to the offender's behaviour, not their location. Whether someone is in a reserve will now be a matter of fact, not the belief of a conservation officer. This subtle change strengthens the legal clarity of the provision and supports fair enforcement.

Other amendments in the bill include updating wording in the Fisheries Act 2000, the Lakes Act 1976, the Water Efficiency Labelling and Standards (ACT) Act 2015 and the National Environment Protection Council Act 1994. These minor amendments ensure that territory legislation is contemporary and aligns with wording in commonwealth and New South Wales legislation.

Mr Assistant Speaker, in summary, these changes are technical, but they have real-world impacts. They support our conservation efforts and ensure that our environmental laws are transparent, consistent and enforceable. I commend the bill to the Assembly.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Bill agreed to in principle.

Leave granted to dispense with the detail stage.

Bill agreed to.

Sitting suspended from 11.36 am to 2.00 pm.

Ministerial arrangements

MR BARR (Kurrajong—Chief Minister, Minister for Economic Development and Minister for Tourism and Trade) (2.00): I wish to advise members that the Treasurer is away from question time again today for personal reasons. In his absence, Minister Stephen-Smith will take questions in the Treasury portfolio, Minister Orr will take questions in the planning and sustainable development and heritage portfolios; and Minister Cheyne will take questions in the transport portfolio.

Questions without notice

Schools—safety

MR HANSON: My question is to the Minister for Education and Early Childhood. Minister, on 18 August you wrote to the Speaker regarding the Assembly's resolution on school safety order laws. In the letter, it was confirmed that a jurisdictional review of the laws was undertaken and that the government would consult with key stakeholders. Could you update the Assembly on the findings of this review?

MS BERRY: I will have to take that question on notice, but I thank the member for the question.

MR HANSON: My pleasure, Minister. Could you also advise when the government will consult with stakeholders on these laws.

MS BERRY: Yes; I will.

MR COCKS: Minister, what are the next steps following this consultation?

MS BERRY: That will be defined by the consultation, but, of course, I will report back to the Assembly if that is appropriate.

Director of Public Prosecutions and Legal Aid—funding

MR HANSON: My question is to the Attorney-General. Attorney, during the last sittings, this Assembly unanimously agreed to my motion that the DPP and Legal Aid be given adequate funding to fulfill their vital roles. Last week, the DPP and the Australian Federal Police Association called for that funding to be provided urgently. The DPP said:

Presently, we are simply not funded to deal with the number of files that are coming into the office ...I'm tired of saying the same thing ...I'm tired of not having that message listened to.

The AFPA said:

It is not fair to victims in the ACT who see their cases delayed or weakened because the DPP doesn't have the resources to keep up.

Attorney, what resources will be provided to the DPP and Legal Aid and when will it be available?

MS CHEYNE: I thank Mr Hanson for his ongoing and, I believe, genuine interest in this. As I have flagged previously and repeatedly and, as I think was understood in the Assembly when we debated the motion Mr Hanson brought previously, there are only a handful of mechanisms through which funding can be provided or appropriated.

We have obviously been through a budget. The DPP has received funding through that budget. We do have budget processes underway, and we are working closely with the DPP, Legal Aid and other justice agencies on appropriate funding, as we work through the current state of our justice system. Also, it is not just about more funding and more staff; it is also about efficiencies with our court processes. For that reason, there is more to do where we think that we will be able to support the DPP, Legal Aid, ACT Policing, the courts and others with those initiatives.

I think you are looking at me because perhaps I have not answered a specific question. If Mr Hanson wants to raise a point of order, it is because I have forgotten it.

MR SPEAKER: Sorry, I missed that last bit.

MS CHEYNE: If Mr Hanson raises a point of order to remind me of what his question was, if I have not been directly relevant to it, I am very happy to be reminded.

MR SPEAKER: In the 18 seconds remaining I can tell you that the question was: what resources will be provided to the DPP and Legal Aid and when will it be available?

MS CHEYNE: Thank you. That is a hypothetical, and I cannot announce government policy in the chamber.

MR HANSON: Attorney, have you been provided any advice on what matters will be prioritised due to a lack of resourcing in the DPP?

MS CHEYNE: I think these conversations are ongoing. Obviously, the major change that occurred this year was in relation to regulatory prosecutions, and the responsibility for that has moved to the Government Solicitor's Office. I was briefed on that by the Solicitor-General earlier this week—and that is going well. My support for that was to assist the DPP with managing the caseload. We are having ongoing discussions about the DPP's support and where its time and efforts are best spent. Of course, I am having those conversations with the justice agencies that are affected by it as well.

MS MORRIS: Attorney, why did the DPP, the AFPA and Legal Aid all have to go out in public to call for more resourcing even after this Assembly agreed to extra resources being provided?

MS CHEYNE: I thank Ms Morris for the question. It was all in response to annual reports being published. So that was the timing. Those interviews were all off the back

of comments at the beginning of the annual report for the DPP—and I would refer members to that, so that they get the full picture.

Safer Families Levy—evaluation

MS MORRIS: My question is to the Minister for the Prevention of Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence. Minister, you have advised the public accounts committee that consultants have been engaged to develop a framework by mid-2026 for evaluating the effectiveness of initiatives funded by the Safer Families Levy. The levy was introduced in 2016. Why will it take the government 10 years to develop a framework to evaluate the effectiveness of initiatives funded by the levy?

DR PATERSON: As I said in the hearing, the levy has gone through a range of iterations over the years and that, at the point that we are at currently, we are in development of the ACT Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Strategy. As part of the work of the strategy we are working with the consultants Impact Co who will be designing an evaluation and monitoring framework. This will be to understand, when the strategy is in place and the plans are in place, how that is being implemented. So we want to understand that our next ten year plan for the territory in addressing domestic, family and sexual violence is actually achieving the outcomes that we want it to achieve. That is why this evaluation monitoring framework will be critical to government's policy development and decision making.

MS MORRIS: Minister, how does the government currently determine the allocation of the funds raised by the levy?

DR PATERSON: We have the principles that have now been outlined, which I introduced to the Assembly earlier this year, and have been developed as a result of the Auditor-General's findings. One of the recommendations from that was to develop a set of guiding principles for the levy. Further to that work, we are developing the ACT Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Strategy, which will guide government investment to address this issue in our community going forward for the next decade.

MS BARRY: Minister, is it this government's policy to spend public money without knowing whether it is effective or not?

DR PATERSON: Absolutely not. This government bases its funding on its evidence-base. So that is why you can go to the ACT Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence website and see the range of evaluations that have occurred on programs. We strive to evaluate the majority of programs that are run to address domestic, family and sexual violence, and what we are doing with the work of the strategy will be solidifying that. That investment across the ACT goes to a range of preventative measures, a range of crisis response measures, perpetrator intervention measures and healing and recovery measures. What we want to do with the evaluation and monitoring framework is to see all of those aspects of what will form part of the strategy monitored and evaluated to ensure that we are effectively addressing this issue.

Working with Vulnerable People scheme—registration fee

MS MORRIS: My question is to the Minister for Police, Fire and Emergency Services.

Documents obtained under freedom of information show that senior staff in your directorate were unaware of the proposal to levy an \$11 fee on volunteers for their Working with Vulnerable People card. The day after the budget, one official wrote to colleagues: "I'm not sure if you've seen the budget, but the ACT government is now charging volunteers \$11 for WWVP cards. Are people upstairs aware of this yet?"

Minister, when were you first made aware of the proposal to charge volunteers \$11 for their Working with Vulnerable People card?

DR PATERSON: I was made aware through the budget process.

MS MORRIS: Minister, did you have any input on the proposal to charge volunteers \$11 for their Working with Vulnerable People card?

DR PATERSON: The fee proposal was developed by Access Canberra. I was not involved in the ERC discussions around this. I found out when the budget was ratified by cabinet, and ESA were made aware then.

MR HANSON: Minister, after the decision was announced, what feedback did you receive from volunteers within your portfolios?

DR PATERSON: I have been going around visiting SES and RFS stations in particular and receiving feedback on a whole range of different measures and challenges that our volunteer services face. I also have a ministerial volunteer group that runs three times a year, which has volunteers who represent all of our volunteer organisations under ESA. They include the mapping and planning support aspect of volunteers, our RFS volunteers, our Volunteer Brigades Association, our Community Fire Units, our community Fire Brigade Historical Society and SES volunteers. We all sit at a table, and I receive feedback from emergency service volunteers. This is a great forum to understand what is going on broadly across the organisation.

What I can say is that we have the most amazing, resourceful, intelligent and committed volunteer organisations within our Emergency Services Agency. I have reiterated to them, through my visits to their units, brigades and stations, just how committed the government is to supporting them.

Cashless gaming—costs

MR RATTENBURY: My question is for the Chief Minister. During the last sitting period when asked about likely costs for implementing a cashless gaming model, the responsible minister, Minister Patterson, said that it was, "not a matter for government; the cost will be borne by the clubs to implement this system". The minister then went on to indicate she had no intention of seeking to understand the likely cost. Chief Minister, do you consider it acceptable for the government to implement a significant policy change with no analysis or understanding of the likely cost?

MR BARR: I thank Mr Rattenbury for the question. I think the premise and the way the question is framed does not accurately describe the process of policy development. It is one thing for assessment of cost to government; it is another for assessment of cost outside of government. There is a process underway and engagement that is occurring.

The cost will vary depending on both the regulatory requirements and the system of procurement. The point the minister is making is that clubs may choose different pathways and different providers, and the costs may well vary so the government may not necessarily be in a position to provide an exact cost for an external party in relation to the matter. And that could vary considerably. And establishing a cost might render that process very expensive for the government.

MR RATTENBURY: Will you apply your usual standard of requiring a cost analysis as part of any cabinet process for this proposed policy?

MR BARR: We certainly have a process of assessing a policy proposal and its implications, but, of course, depending on the nature of the regulatory intervention, the costs may be lesser or greater, and may depend entirely on the commercial decision of a club or a club group.

MISS NUTTALL: Will you ensure that those costings are made publicly available?

MR BARR: I am not sure that we will be able to, because they will be a commercial decision of the clubs'. So, the government cannot force them to reveal their private contractual arrangements, but I am sure they will talk and engage with the government—and indeed probably more broadly, publicly about what they might anticipate the costs would be under different regulatory models.

Canberra Health Services—orthopaedic surgery

MR EMERSON: My question is to the Minister for Health. Minister, on 18 March this year, in response to concerns raised by one of our constituents who had waited six years for a hip replacement, you indicated that “if you go on the pooled waiting list and you’re willing to have your surgery done by another surgeon, it will be done a lot more quickly”. Later that week, this constituent was contacted by CHS and informed that “there are no pooled waiting lists”. Seven months on, are pooled waiting lists now in place for all orthopaedic surgeries taking place in the public system?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I thank Mr Emerson for the question. I think he knows that the answer is no. As I have previously indicated to him, and to the Assembly, I was using pooled waiting lists as a broad term rather than as a technical term, in terms of the work that the territory-wide surgical services team has been able to do for some time, if people contact them and they are on a particular surgeon’s waiting list and they are looking to see if there is an opportunity to get their surgery done more quickly. There was a process by which they could give the team at Canberra Health Services a call and find out if there was a shorter waiting list.

It is still the case that, in orthopaedics, there is not a single pooled waiting list. However, work is underway, and continues to be underway, between Canberra Health Services and the orthopaedics team to move to a situation where everyone on the public waiting list is being seen in order of wait, according to urgency, which is what people would expect. Indeed, I had a conversation with a constituent over the weekend who was very surprised to learn that that was not the way that the public surgery waiting list operated. When we talked through some of the culture and practice regarding the way that it has worked in the past, they were actually in agreement that, if you are on a public list, you

should be on a single public list and you should be seen in turn, according to urgency.

MR EMERSON: Minister, when will these new official pooled waiting lists be in effect, or likely to be in effect, for all specialties?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I cannot give a firm timeline on that. I thank Mr Emerson for his ongoing interest. One of the things that we have absolutely committed to our surgical groups is that the Canberra Health Services leadership will continue to work in a collaborative manner with them to bring everyone along to ensure that there is a shared understanding of what is happening.

What I can advise, in relation to orthopaedic surgery wait times, though, is that, as of 29 September 2025, the number of patients who were ready for care and on the waiting list had decreased by eight per cent from 30 September 2024—a reduction from 2,139 patients ready for orthopaedic surgery to 1,961—and that Canberra Health Services is doing the same level of orthopaedic surgery for the first quarter of the financial year as they did for the previous corresponding period. In terms of any interruption to orthopaedic surgery, there has not been an interruption, in terms of the numbers. In the first quarter of 2025-26, 477 patients were removed from the waiting list, compared to 473 in the same period in the previous year.

MS CARRICK: Minister, how many surgeons currently employed by CHS are refusing to use pooled waiting lists?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I thank Ms Carrick for the supplementary question. I would not characterise it in that way. I think there has been a culture and practice built up over many years at Canberra Hospital and North Canberra Hospital—previously Calvary Public Hospital—about the way things operated. Clearly, both specialists and patients have an expectation based on the way that things have been operating to date.

There is a collaborative conversation underway about moving to a different way of operating. But I would not characterise the way that specialists are engaging in that conversation in the way that Ms Carrick has. I want to emphasise instead that this is a collaborative process that ultimately is about equitable treatment for patients and putting patients at the centre of care.

Woden Town Centre—Scentre Group

MS CARRICK: My question is to the Chief Minister. Yesterday, Scentre Group, the operator of Westfield Woden, released a concept master plan for the redevelopment of their Westfield shopping centre. It contains 17 new residential towers up to 55 storeys high. This will bring the number of residential towers in the town centre to over 50. The concept master plan says, “The future light rail corridor along Callum Street is reinforced with built form density.” Chief Minister, according to your calendar, you met with Scentre Group twice in the last year. What advice did you give Scentre Group about how they should approach their plans to redevelop their Woden property?

MR BARR: Yes, I did meet with Scentre Group, principally to work with them in relation to increased housing opportunities, both in Belconnen and in Woden, associated with build-to-rent projects in particular. Scentre Group are a publicly listed

company on the Australian Stock Exchange. They are a credible and multiple retail and housing developer across Australia. The advice I gave them was to undertake pre-development application consultation with the community, which is exactly what they are doing.

MS CARRICK: Chief Minister, did you discuss with Scentre Group the idea of including community facilities in their concept master plan in exchange for increased building heights and/or reduced lease variation charges?

MR BARR: Scentre Group put forward a proposal, consistent with their previous proposals in other Australian cities, that they would contribute, as part of any new housing development, to providing community facilities. They have raised the possibility of effectively undertaking an even greater level of community facility provision as part of an offset to a lease variation charge. There is precedent for this in the ACT. That occurred with the Queensland Investment Corporation in relation to the Canberra Centre expansion, to list one example, but there are others.

Of course, no decision has been made by government and it remains simply a proposal that would need to go through a major plan amendment process and then an individual development assessment in relation to the matters. But, as a question of principle, it is already firmly established in the ACT over many decades—in the CBD, in Belconnen and in other parts of Canberra—that developers can make a contribution to community facility provision as part of the redevelopment of a precinct. This occurs in every other Australian city all the time. It should not be new or anything interesting or exciting in the context of the concept, because it is well established in Canberra and around Australia, and indeed around the world.

MR EMERSON: Chief Minister, to the best of your knowledge, what interactions has the inter-directorate Woden town centre working group had with Scentre Group prior to the release of their concept master plan for the redevelopment of the Woden town centre?

MR BARR: Could Mr Emerson repeat the first part of his question.

MR EMERSON: What interactions has the inter-directorate Woden town centre working group had with Scentre Group, to the best of your knowledge, in relation to this plan?

MR BARR: I thank Mr Emerson for the question. I needed to be clear on exactly which group he was talking about. I will need to take that on notice.

Planning—block 45, section 54 Belconnen

MS TOUGH: My question is to the Minister for Homes, Homelessness and New Suburbs. Minister, what is the plan for block 45, section 54, Belconnen—the vacant site next to Margaret Timpson Park?

MS BERRY: I thank Ms Tough for the question. I am pleased to inform the chamber that block 45, section 54 in Belconnen will be released via an expression of interest process early in 2026—between January and March 2026. This EOI will be open to

registered community housing providers. This means that the 60 dwellings that the site can accommodate will be community housing. I will not have the exact numbers on the breakdown of the social and affordable content until after the EOI is complete, but I can share that the government anticipates a mix of one-, two- and three-bedroom units.

MS TOUGH: Minister, why is providing this site for community housing important?

MS BERRY: I thank Ms Tough for the supplementary. The release of the site to CHPs will help provide much-needed and well-located affordable housing, contributing to the government's goal to enable 5,000 additional public, community and affordable rental dwellings by the end of 2030.

This site is located next to Margaret Timpson Park and is opposite the Westfield Shopping Centre. Having new families and households living in this spot will activate the park and add vibrancy to this wonderful neighbourhood. It is also a fantastic location for new residents, with good access to shops, services and public transport, which delivers the quality of life the ACT government has committed to for all Canberrans.

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: Minister, how will the community get to have their say on what the development looks like, especially given that the upgrades to Margaret Timpson Park are happening at the same time?

MS BERRY: I thank Mr Werner-Gibbings for the question. The Suburban Land Agency is working closely with the City and Environment Directorate to ensure that the development of section 54 is well integrated into the Margaret Timpson Park upgrades. I understand CED's concept designs for the Margaret Timpson Park project will be shared with the community on YourSay by the end of 2025 and, of course, there will be plenty of community consultation as part of the development application process for the site after the EOI process.

Public housing—maintenance

MS BARRY: My question is to the minister for housing. Minister, yesterday you told the Assembly you "did not believe" the public housing maintenance budget had already been exhausted. Minister, are you aware of a meeting last week between officials, Programmed facilities and subcontractors, where they were told the budget had been expended and there would be no new work?

MS BERRY: I will take that question on notice.

MS BARRY: Minister, what happens to the tenants of public housing units when essential maintenance is not undertaken for budget reasons?

MS BERRY: Thank you. Public housing maintenance is occurring across public housing. I have repeatedly asked members in this place that if they are contacted by tenants of ACT public housing where works have not been taken out to work with my office and we will make sure we follow up and ensure that work is conducted or that it has been followed up with the tenant at least. I am not aware of any work that has not been completed once it has been raised with my office. But again, I just put that call out to the Assembly that I would follow that up with housing and Programmed should it be

brought to my attention.

MR COCKS: Minister, how much did the government allocate for public housing maintenance this financial year, how much has been spent to date and has any money been reallocated?

MS BERRY: That information is available in the budget papers. I can do that work for the Assembly and I can find it. The amount that has been allocated for public housing is in the budget papers. If I have information at this time of what has been expended then I will provide that to the Assembly. So I will take that part of the question on notice and if I have that information available, I will provide it.

Sport and recreation—Gungahlin United FC

MISS NUTTALL: My question is to the Minister for Sport and Recreation. Regarding the collapse of the Gungahlin United Football Club, the ABC reported a government spokesperson as saying the government had “worked constructively” with Gungahlin United Football Club over recent years and had “offered payment plans” for sports ground hire.

If the government worked constructively, what is it that the government actually did and what help was that, given the debt was first reported as \$200,000 and is now being reported at \$550,000?

MS BERRY: First of all, I will correct that facts in this matter. It is not a \$500,000 debt to the ACT government; it is \$180,000 in unpaid fees to the ACT government. I am not sure of the makeup of the rest of the funds that the Gungahlin United Football Club owes. That is a matter for the Gungahlin United Football Club as well as Capital Football.

The ACT government worked with the club, as they would with any other club that was experiencing financial difficulty in arranging repayment plans. This is what the ACT government did in this circumstance, and what the ACT government does in every circumstance, should that be the case with any sports club.

MISS NUTTALL: Minister, did the government provide governance or financial training for club executives who were trying to deal with the situation, or was this more an exercise in watching constructively—albeit from the sidelines?

MS BERRY: I completely reject the end part of your question, Miss Nuttall—through you, Mr Speaker. It is unnecessary in finding out information about what is happening with Gungahlin United Football Club, or, indeed, the support that the ACT government does provide.

In many circumstances, if there are issues around governance or financial challenges that clubs experience and it is brought to my attention—again, this is a matter for those clubs, not the ACT government—but if it is brought to my attention or to the sport and rec team, then, yes, they do work with them on a range of advice and support for financial controls or around governance. That is a regular offer from the sport and rec team.

So, again, I think it is completely disingenuous to put that at the end of your sentence, Miss Nuttall—though you, Mr Speaker. If you wanted to ask a question about support for the club, you did not need to put the bit on the end.

MR BRADDOCK: Minister, what conversation has the government had with Capital Football as the peak body—given they are the peak body and receive government funding to run the sport in the ACT?

MS BERRY: Again, the ACT government does not interfere in discussions or decisions with sporting groups across the ACT. However, I have contacted Capital Football and asked them if they would keep me up to date, where appropriate, on the situation regarding Gungahlin United Football Club.

I know this has been devastating news for the Gungahlin community and for those 1,500 to 1,700 children and families that have participated in the sport, and, indeed, for the football community across the ACT. That is why I have asked Capital Football if they would keep me advised and up to date on any other further news or anything else that might arise as a consequence of this announcement.

I did meet with the interim board before they made their announcement on Saturday, and I have offered to keep talking with them. I know that the sport and rec team has offered to work with them where appropriate. That is about as far as the ACT government can go with regard to these organisations. They have their own responsibilities. We work with them where it is appropriate and where we can, understanding that this is a significant impact on football. I have seen all the other clubs across the ACT reach out to provide support for families who might want to play football for another club.

But there is some time between now and the winter season commencing next year for the junior and community sports side of things, so I am hopeful that a resolution will be found and that there will be a proponent that comes forward. Again, that is our hope, and if there is anything that the government can do, where it is appropriate, we will support that.

Parking—Theatre Lane car park closure

MR MILLIGAN: My question is to the Minister for Business, Arts and Creative Industries. The ACT government has closed the entire Theatre Lane car park this month, for construction of the new Lyric Theatre. Minister, how many general public, accessible, and loading zones car spaces have been closed?

MR BARR: I will take that question. I will take that question on notice, in terms of the exact number. But, yes, there are car parks that are closed as a result of needing to build that facility. That is the nature of a development.

MR MILLIGAN: Minister, how many accessible and loading zone car spaces are left within a reasonable distance to the Canberra Theatre and local businesses?

MR BARR: There is certainly a program to relocate those, and there is public

information in relation to that. I cannot quickly Google it, but it is available online and I may be able to provide that before the end of question time.

MS LEE: Minister, why did the government agree to the total closure of the Theatre Lane car park, as opposed to allowing a number of disability and short-term parking spaces to be retained?

MR BARR: There are operational requirements associated with the early works. There are, of course, work health and safety requirements. I understand there may be some capacity to maintain some car parks within that broader or immediate precinct. There certainly will be a period of disruption for several more months in relation to light rail stage 2A, but then my understanding is that car parks will become available in that precinct that are not part of the theatre early works project. So, there will be car parking back in that area, just not right at the moment.

High-risk weather season—preparedness

MR BRADDOCK: My question is to the Minister for Police, Fire and Emergency Services. I note the recent record-breaking heat across the country, as well as the sudden stratospheric warming event which has only happened in the Southern Hemisphere twice before, in 2002 and 2019, each time resulting in devastating bushfires for the Canberra region. Is there an updated outlook for the higher risk weather season?

DR PATERSON: Yes, there is. I believe that I tabled a response in the last sitting, detailing the outlook for the weather season. The outlook is for cool and wet weather during summer again; nonetheless our Emergency Services Agency is well prepared, and it is monitoring the current situation.

MR BRADDOCK: Minister, did that outlook take into account the changes to the stratospheric warming event that are happening in the Southern Ocean?

DR PATERSON: While I am not a weather woman, I believe that the advice I received is that there are cool stratospheric atmospherics coming up from Antarctica. I will take that on notice and provide some weather advice to the Assembly.

MR RATTENBURY: I am bemused by the minister's flippancy. Minister, has the ACT government done all it can to prepare for a potential severe heat event this coming summer?

DR PATERSON: Yes, the ACT government is very committed to preparing for heat events, storm events and any range of emergency events that our community may face over the summer months. Our Rural Fire Service does a lot of work to prepare our community in the event of a bushfire. We have just released the Strategic Bushfire Management Plan, which outlines the plan for the government over the next decade, in terms of how we prepare for bushfires. There will be messaging out in the community over the coming months, detailing bushfire risk. As we have seen, we are now part of the Fires Near Me app. We now incorporate with New South Wales to be able to provide community information very promptly around the risk of bushfires.

The helicopters and aerial support for bushfires will be coming into our jurisdiction at

some point soon. I am sure I can update the Assembly on that. There has been significant work. The SES is also prepared for storm events in particular, encouraging the community to clear their gutters and remove any trees near their houses, which supports bushfire preparedness as well.

Community events—SpringOUT

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: My question is to minister for LGBTIQA+ affairs. Minister, people always look forward to SpringOUT, and I understand this year's festival launches today. How has this government supported SpringOUT to deliver the festival? And why is it so important to this city?

MS ORR: I thank the member for his question. The SpringOUT festival does, in fact, launch today. I will be joining event partners, sponsors, volunteers, SpringOUT members and members of the LGBTIQA+ community and allies at the official launch this evening after we adjourn today. I understand the Chief Minister will also be showing his continued support of this event. The government is committed to making Canberra the most LGBTIQA+ welcoming and inclusive city in the nation, and that means that everyone feels valued, celebrated and reflected. This commitment is also reflected in action 4.3 of the Capital of Equality Strategy's First Action Plan: to resource events run by and for the community that celebrate the diversity of the community. The ACT government, in spirit with this, is proud to fund the SpringOUT event on an ongoing and annual basis.

SpringOUT is important to us because it is important to Canberra. This year will be the 26th SpringOUT festival. The festival's legacy is one of pride, equality and acceptance over many years across Canberra communities. SpringOUT's importance to Canberra is in the community's spirit, resilience and shared values of safety, support and equity for all. These principles remain relevant through initiatives like SpringOUT.

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: Minister, what is on the festival program?

Members interjecting—

Mr Hanson interjecting—

MS ORR: I dare say that, if Mr Hanson were quiet, he might find it an event he wants to attend. If he is quite interested and does want to go—or if anyone in the chamber wants to; it is a public event—he can go along. There is a full snapshot of the festival's program available on SpringOUT's website. I encourage everyone, including Mr Hanson, to look at the program and attend any events from the busy line-up. Some of the highlights—I can see Mr Hanson has his phone out and he might be putting this straight in his diary—include the SpringOUT flag-raising ceremony, which is on Thursday, 30 October here at the Legislative Assembly. Fair Day is not to be missed on Saturday, 1 November at Glebe Park. The Office of LGBTIQA+ Affairs' roundtable is on 5 November, again here at the Legislative Assembly. Queer Reads is on at BOOK FACE Gungahlin on 6 November for anyone who likes to read a good book and have a chat about it. Canberra Qwire's performance is on Saturday, 8 November at the Albert Hall. And the FUSE Big Gay Breakfast is on Sunday, 23 November at Tilley's.

With respect to the turnout, I can tell you that SpringOUT's attendance across every event last year came to around 11,000 in total. We will not know this year's turnout until the festival closes, but, if it is anything like last year, and with more stalls at the Fair Day and all the other events that are going on, I would not be surprised if we beat that number—maybe by at least one if Mr Hanson comes along!

MS TOUGH: Minister, as well as supporting SpringOUT, what else is this government doing to support and celebrate the LGBTIQA+ community?

MS ORR: I have spoken about how the government is supporting SpringOUT and how this reflects our commitments to make Canberra the most LGBTIQA+ welcoming and inclusive city in the nation by ensuring everyone is valued, celebrated and respected, and these principles also inform the government's facilitation of several projects and initiatives that support and celebrate the community in its diverse intersections. Some of the important achievements over this year include the forming of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander LGBTIQA+ advisory group, supporting Women with Disabilities ACT and Inclusive Rainbow Voices to deliver a new peer support program for LGBTIQA+ people with disability, launching The Unsaid Says A Lot campaign, and delivering the 2025 ACT LGBTIQA+ community survey.

I would like to acknowledge the good work of the Chief Minister in this space and his leadership, having recently taken over the portfolio. There is a very proud and progressive platform to build from, and I look forward to working with everyone as we do that.

ACT public service—work health and safety

MR COCKS: My question is to the Minister for Industrial Relations. Minister, table 8.3 of this year's *State of the service report* revealed a 48 per cent increase in the number of contacts of bullying and harassment in the ACT public service—now 4.8 times the number it was a decade ago. Minister, has WorkSafe ACT investigated the systemic issues that may be contributing to the drastic rise in bullying and harassment and the accompanying psychosocial risks?

MR PETTERSSON: Can I get the tail-end of that question again?

MR COCKS: Minister, has WorkSafe ACT investigated the systemic issues that may be contributing to the drastic rise in bullying and harassment and the accompanying psychosocial risks?

MR PETTERSSON: I thank Mr Cocks for the question. I will take it on notice. I am aware of their activities in relation to the public service. The specific question on a systemic review I will need to take on notice to provide an accurate answer.

MR COCKS: Minister, what actions have you taken as the minister responsible for safety in the workplace to prevent bullying and harassment becoming an even greater problem in the ACT public service?

MR PETTERSSON: I would like to thank Mr Cocks for the question. As members would be aware, I do not issue operational directions to WorkSafe with regard to

individual matters or individual entities. I outlined my expectations and priorities to WorkSafe, and that is available to members.

Mr Cocks: On a point of order on relevance, Mr Speaker: the question was not limited to WorkSafe, but actions with the minister's portfolio responsibilities.

MR SPEAKER: Given that clarification, if there is anything else you want to add, Minister—

MR PETTERSSON: I shouldn't but I will add that I would direct the member to the Minister for the Public Service with regard to that particular question.

MS MORRIS: Minister, on how many occasions have you met with the Minister for the Public Service to discuss the drastic increase in bullying and harassment?

MR PETTERSSON: I would like to thank the member for the question. I have frequent meetings with all of my colleagues and we canvass an array of issues—portfolio matters being central to that.

WorkSafe ACT—compliance

MR COCKS: My question is to the minister for industrial relations. Minister, the WorkSafe ACT Public Service and Public Sector Strategy is outlined in the annual report for 2024-25 and has four objectives. Essentially these are: increasing knowledge and understanding of WorkSafe's role; embedding good work health and safety practice; securing public sector stakeholder commitment to improving compliance rates; and enforcing compliance. Minister, why has WorkSafe not adopted a formal objective of reducing bullying and harassment in the ACT public sector?

MR PETTERSSON: I would like to thank Mr Cocks for the question. The role of WorkSafe is a regulator. The primary responsibility for work health and safety responsibilities within any organisation is the responsibility of that organisation.

MR COCKS: Minister, why is it necessary for WorkSafe ACT to have a strategic goal to gain commitment to compliance as part of a formal strategy? Would you not expect compliance to be a bare minimum for the public service?

MR PETTERSSON: I would like to thank the member for the question. WorkSafe works collaboratively with both public and private sector interests. I understand that there is a productive relationship between WorkSafe and the ACT Public Service, acknowledging that WorkSafe has a particular role and responsibility as the regulator and the public service has responsibility for the administration of their responsibilities as PCBU's.

MR MILLIGAN: Minister, what concerns has WorkSafe ACT raised with the executive group manager in relation to systemic WHS issues?

MR PETTERSSON: I will take that on notice.

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

Supplementary answers to questions without notice

Parking—Theatre Lane car park closure

MR BARR: I was able to do a quick Google search. It is on the City Services website, and there are 14 accessible car parking places that have been relocated to the City Hill and Hobart Place car parks. When you look at the map which is available, there is a large number, so that adds to some of the existing disability and accessible spaces.

I will quickly run through the list. There are now 20 at City Hill car park. There are seven at the Constitution Place car park, three in Nangari Street car park, and one in the Akuna Street car park. There are 12 in the Hobart Place car park, four in the One City Hill car park, seven in the Marcus Clarke Street car park, nine in the City West car park, 93 in the Canberra Centre car park that is bordered by Cooyong Street and Akuna Street, and another two in the Canberra Centre car park towards the Braddon end of their car parking. There is also accessible car parking in Moore Street, Hutton Street, Murden Street, in Phillip Law Street and in Kendall Lane; and, at the National Convention Centre, there are 16 places.

A considerable amount of accessible car parking has been made available due to the temporary closure of parts of what is infamously referred to as the Mooseheads car park.

High-risk weather season—preparedness

DR PATERSON: I would like to respond and correct the record by giving the official advice in answer to Mr Braddock’s weather question. I received the formal advice a few weeks ago. The temperature high above Antarctica has climbed to more than 30 degrees Celsius, weakening the Arctic polar vortex. This is known as “sudden stratospheric warming”. This event is not common for the Southern Hemisphere; therefore, it is difficult to forecast what impact this will have on weather patterns.

In the short term, most of mainland Australia experienced hotter weather. Longer term, this sudden stratospheric warming has created modelling uncertainty. The Bureau of Meteorology recently released its long-term forecast, predicting above-average rainfall across most of the eastern half of the country, and possibly a weak La Nina forming.

While this prediction currently remains in place, the Bureau of Meteorology has advised that the long-term forecast could be updated over the coming weeks, following this sudden stratospheric warming event. The ESA will continue to monitor the impacts of this event, based on the advice from the Bureau of Meteorology. I am very happy to provide updates to the Assembly or any members on this as advice is received.

Housing—Rent Relief Fund

MS CHEYNE: There were some questions that my colleagues took on notice for me yesterday, which I can answer now. Mr Rattenbury asked a question about the Rent Relief Fund; specifically, why the government has not communicated with Care since the fund was closed and the government announced an intention to reopen a fund. Minister Stephen-Smith took that question on notice, and I can respond to that now.

The ACT government has been in regular contact with Care and certainly was while the previous iteration of the fund was being administered by Care. This included the government receiving regular reports on the progress of the fund, as well as meeting with Care to discuss the fund. These meetings provided government with insights as to the effectiveness of the fund. Since the fund closed in July 2025, the ACT government has received a final report from Care. That report contained much useful information in relation to how the fund was utilised, together with de-identified demographic information about grant recipients.

In relation to engaging with Care since the government's announcement of its intention to establish a new fund, the government procurement rules limit the interaction that government can have with potential suppliers of services prior to tenders for services being issued or decided upon. These rules are aimed at ensuring fairness between potential suppliers and that no particular supplier is given an unfair advantage in relation to a potential contract for services.

Given that the government has announced its intention to consider the establishment of a new fund and that any future fund would necessarily be subject to a procurement process for an organisation to administer it, it is not appropriate for the government to have detailed discussions with Care about the future of the fund at this point in time. However, we have certainly been considering the information obtained from Care through its reports and from previous discussions with Care when undertaking work in relation to the establishment of the new fund.

Sport and recreation—Stromlo-Cotter mountain bike trail

MS CHEYNE: Miss Nuttall asked the planning minister a question that the Chief Minister took on notice, but the question should have been for me, on the Stromlo to Cotter biking trail. The question was about the company Dirt Art having been granted the tender for the work. It entered into administration, and the question was about what impact this would have on the projected timeline.

Dirt Art has delivered on key milestones as required in their contract, and there is no impact on the timeline for the completion of trails as a result of their entering administration. There are two elements outstanding in their contract, which are coordinating the environmental and planning approvals and finalising the construction tender documentation. These are components that have not been undertaken, but nor have they been paid to Dirt Art, so the government is likely to internally manage those outstanding elements.

Ms Clay then asked whether the trail was on track to be within expected budget and timeframes. While Dirt Art going into administration does not change the timeframes, I would note—and I think this is well understood—that the trail was originally planned to be completed by June 2025. It has experienced delays, but those delays have been associated with the complexities of working through cultural, environmental, social and land tenure constraints associated with the proposed route. PCS is working closely with key stakeholders on the final alignment, land access arrangements and associated works.

Working with Vulnerable People scheme—registration fee—standing order 118AA

MR COCKS: I have a few matters under 118AA. I will try and work through these broadly in order. The first one is related to Ms Morris's question to Minister Paterson. That was the fourth Liberal question. Ms Morris asked when the minister was first made aware, and the minister responded by indicating how, but not when. There was no timeframe indicated in the response. I believe that was not an answer to the question.

Canberra Health Services—orthopaedic surgery—standing order 118AA

MR COCKS: In Ms Carrick's supplementary to Mr Emerson's question, Ms Carrick very explicitly asked for a number in that question. Minister Stephen-Smith—and I have reflected on this—did not provide a response to that actual request for a number; she debated some other questions. I do not believe that that question was answered.

Ms Berry: You are going to be Mr Parton's least favourite colleague.

MR COCKS: I did apologise in advance for what I was about to do.

ACT public service—work health and safety—standing order 118AA

MR COCKS: Mr Speaker, in Liberal question 7, and in particular supplementary question 1, I asked the minister what actions he had taken within his portfolio. He proceeded—after your suggestion that he direct his response based on my clarification—to say that the question should be directed to the Minister for the Public Service. The question was related to the actions of the minister for industrial relations. I do not believe that is a response to that question.

The second supplementary on that one, from Ms Morris, requested a specific number, about the number of occasions on which the minister has met. I do not believe that that was answered, either.

MR SPEAKER: I will consider those. I will not rule on any of them right now. We will have some rulings on those by the end of the day. Also, if any member comes to the chamber and feels that they are short of a tie, they can always grab one from my office.

**Legislative Assembly—unparliamentary language
Ruling by Speaker**

MR SPEAKER: This morning, in the debate concerning the noting of petitions, Mr Hanson made a short speech and stated, "and I condemn the anti-Semitic Greens". Later, in that same debate, Mr Rattenbury asked that I review the words used by Mr Hanson and rule as to whether they were parliamentary.

I have examined the proof transcript of the proceedings, together with the relevant provisions of the Assembly standing orders. Standing order 54 states:

A Member may not use offensive words against the Assembly or any Member

thereof or against any member of the judiciary.

On personal reflections, standing order 55 states:

All imputations of improper motives and all personal reflections on Members shall be considered highly disorderly.

Standing order 57 states:

When the attention of the Speaker is drawn to words used, the Speaker shall determine whether or not they are offensive or disorderly.

I have looked at precedents in our chamber, as well as the House of Representatives. I am fully aware of circumstances of very recent times when words of a similar nature, and indeed the same nature, were used to describe not an individual but a group, and that they were allowed to stand.

I also look to the word “racist”, which has been previously ruled to be unparliamentary in our chamber. Both the *Concise Oxford Dictionary* and the *Macquarie Dictionary* define “anti-Semitic” as being one who is hostile to Jews.

I would point members to page 333 of the *Companion*. The late Speaker Cornwell ruled that remarks that reflect upon a group rather than an individual were also unparliamentary, because, if it was used against an individual, it would be ruled accordingly. That was the very clear ruling that he went with in August 1996.

Having considered the matter raised, I rule that the words used were offensive and disorderly. Accordingly, I ask Mr Hanson to withdraw any imputation against the Greens members of this Assembly.

Mr Hanson: Mr Speaker, I withdraw.

Multicultural communities—facilities

MS BARRY (Ginninderra) (3.03), by leave: I move my motion, as amended:

That this Assembly:

(1) notes that:

- (a) community groups; including multicultural communities consistently report that the facilities currently provided in the ACT are inadequate for some types of community meetings, particularly larger and specific purpose gatherings;
- (b) where facilities are available, there have been concerns about maintenance, pest control and cleanliness;
- (c) community groups, including multicultural community groups, are charged at a community rate when hiring ACT Government facilities;
- (d) although this rate is set at a level to only recover costs incurred by the Government for maintaining these properties these costs continue to increase and are too expensive for some community groups;

- (e) that under population projections, Canberra's population will continue to grow quickly putting further pressure on community facilities; and
 - (f) loneliness has been identified as a significant issue in the ACT, having an adverse impact on health and mental health, contributing to concerning trends for self-harm and suicide;
- (2) further notes that multicultural community organisations have reported that:
- (a) the Theo Notaras Multicultural Centre is no longer meet the needs of the community;
 - (b) Labor's election commitments included three new Community Centres in Gungahlin, Woden and Molonglo, these are general community facilities, not specific to the needs of multicultural communities;
 - (c) the Gungahlin Community Centre is already under construction with limited community consultation. Its design specifications do not reflect the needs of the multicultural communities;
 - (d) multicultural communities bid for land allocations for purpose-built community and cultural facilities are tied up for years in opaque approval processes, leaving some communities feeling unheard and disenfranchised; and
- (3) calls on the Government to:
- (a) conduct a survey seeking the views of all multicultural groups in the ACT to determine what their current and potential future needs are in relation to community and cultural facilities, and publish the outcome;
 - (b) map those identified needs to current and planned facilities, to identify gaps and priority development needs;
 - (c) use the outcomes of this process to plan for the future needs of the community for places to meet;
 - (d) recognising that meeting the needs of multicultural communities will require additional services and spaces, delivered through collaboration between government, community, public organisations, and private enterprise, with active support and participation of multicultural communities themselves; and
 - (e) report back to the Assembly within 12 months with the outcomes of the gap analysis and how this will inform future government planning decisions.

In moving this motion, I would like to thank Mr Pettersson, Mr Braddock, Mr Emerson and their staff for the constructive and positive engagement on this motion. I think we have been able to achieve a good outcome which will be of material benefit for communities and multicultural organisations wanting to access facilities over time. I sincerely thank their offices for their engagement. I think the motion reflects a position that we are all comfortable with.

Canberra is a proud multicultural community with a tradition of providing opportunities and venues for cultural, sporting and other interests. We count among us representatives of the world's longest continuous culture in our First Nations communities. We are the focal point of the democratic traditions of the Westminster political system introduced through our British traditions. We are connected to the world through migration from every country on the planet. Uniquely in Australia, we are home to the foreign

diplomatic missions through which we negotiate our place on the world stage.

Part of Canberra's proud tradition is the continuation of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander tradition in which Canberra was a neutral meeting place, where those with a diversity of views can come together to find solutions, to find ways to live peacefully together. It is in this context that I bring this motion forward today.

Communities, particularly multicultural communities, continue to call for more accessible and affordable places to meet, for land allocations and for dedicated community facilities and places of worship. Organisations like AusDance struggle to find affordable, fit-for-purpose community centres for their activities.

Community groups struggle to afford the increasing costs of ACT government community venues. They tell me that they are frustrated by the slow progress on identification of suitable land for community facilities. They tell me that they are frustrated by the lack of availability of appropriate meeting places. They tell me that they are frustrated by the high cost of the facilities that are available.

Communities tell me that they do not see an overarching strategy behind the development of community facilities. Land releases appear to be ad hoc, with opaque criteria being used to select winners, with some perceiving a good relationship with ministers being the primary determinant of success.

Where community centres are built, such as Labor's proposed centres in Gungahlin, Woden and Molonglo, these involve selective community consultation, typically not taking into account the particular needs of the multicultural or other groups. Where multicultural community centres or facilities exist, there appears to be no overarching maintenance or improvement plan, with facilities such as the Theo Notaras centre deteriorating to a point of unsuitability.

We know that this government is great at announcements but falls very short on delivery. Its planning process is a mess; its delivery of services is a shambles. An example of this is when it announced, with great fanfare, that the commissioning process would include looking at support for multicultural communities. But it has been three years and this process has not even started.

My motion calls on the government to do what Canberrans expect of modern governments. It calls on the government to do the environmental scanning necessary to understand the needs of Canberrans now and into the future. It calls on the government to map the facilities that we currently have. It calls on the government to do the gap analysis that would help it to identify the things that it needs to focus on to meet the needs of Canberrans. It calls on the government to use the information to inform its planning considerations and decision-making.

These are not big asks. This approach reflects what Canberrans expect of a good government. It reflects the approach that a Canberra Liberals government would take to provide certainty in the planning process and ensure that better and fairer local services are provided.

I note that multicultural groups have particular and unique needs for meeting venues.

Discrete facilities for different language and cultural groups enable linguistically isolated groups to come together for mutual support and assistance. Having access to facilities at a price point that communities can afford is important for newer refugee migrant communities, who struggle to afford current costs.

Some communities have outgrown current facilities, with gatherings of thousands, and tens of thousands, now impossible with current infrastructure. Particular religious practices often require 24/7 access for extended periods and the installation of furnaces for offerings. We need facilities that can meet this broad and diverse range of community needs.

We know that loneliness has been identified as a significant issue in the ACT, having an adverse impact on health and mental health, resulting in concerning trends of harmful and suicidal ideations. For migrant communities, particularly for those learning English, multicultural community centres provide an important link and social connection.

Multicultural groups have identified to me that access to facilities that meet their needs is one of their biggest challenges. The Canberra Liberals' approach is to work with communities in partnership to identify public-private collaborations that do not kill the budget bottom line, allowing for good ideas and partnerships to thrive.

Some people would consider that multicultural communities are seeking these facilities for free. That is not the case. Some multicultural communities have the capacity to be able to contribute to these facilities. All they need is the land to be identified, and sensible planning approvals.

I ask those on the other side not to allow a careless policy position to kill a sensible solution for Canberrans. Once again, I thank all of my colleagues who have been engaged in the negotiations to bring this motion forward, particularly Mr Pettersson, the minister, Mr Braddock, Mr Emerson and their staff for working collaboratively with me to come up with a sensible motion to make life better for Canberrans. I commend my motion to the Assembly.

MR PETTERSSON (Yerrabi—Minister for Business, Arts and Creative Industries, Minister for Children, Youth and Families, Minister for Multicultural Affairs and Minister for Skills, Training and Industrial Relations) (3.11): I would like to thank Ms Barry for bringing forward this amended motion this afternoon, which gives us all the opportunity to highlight the vital role that our multicultural community plays in Canberra, and the importance of ensuring equitable access to public facilities.

At the heart of this motion is the understanding that Canberra's community, and particularly its multicultural community, is vibrant, diverse and dynamic. Across our city, multicultural groups host an extraordinary range of public and private events that celebrate diversity and all the benefits that it brings with it.

As Minister for Multicultural Affairs, I spend much of my time meeting with local multicultural groups and hearing about the tremendous work they do, as well as attending events and celebrations. I am consistently struck by the dedication and passion of our multicultural communities. Supporting our communities is, and will

remain, a key priority for this government.

I want to make a quick detour from my prepared remarks, however, to reflect upon questions asked in question time yesterday, as well as comments that Ms Barry made in her remarks before. There were questions in question time suggesting that I, as minister, have been picking winners; today, Ms Barry referred to a favourable relationship with a minister leading to good outcomes. They are very dangerous insinuations to make, and highly offensive. If members in this place wish to raise matters in that regard, please do so in an appropriate way. Making these insinuations is offensive, and I find it very hard to have a constructive relationship with someone who would make such insinuations against me, having regard to the work that I do, diligently, in putting the interests of the community first and foremost.

A key demonstration of this government's commitment to inclusion and diversity is the Charter for Multiculturalism enacted through the Multiculturalism Act 2023. This charter cements our shared values and guides Canberra's continued growth as an inclusive, welcoming city. We know that, to achieve a thriving and harmonious multicultural city, groups need access to places and spaces where they can gather, celebrate and mark significant events.

I am pleased that the ACT government provides a wide range of facilities to support this, such as the Theo Notaras Multicultural Centre. The centre is a place for Canberrans to meet, celebrate and share their cultures. It provides a gateway to essential settlement support through government-funded programs, delivered in partnership with community sector organisations such as MARSS. The centre includes a number of meeting and function spaces that are regularly hired for multicultural events and forums, catering for up to 120 people. With the function room, which can fit 120 people, the cost to hire this is \$277 for a community organisation.

Fitzroy Pavilion at Exhibition Park is designed for larger gatherings. The venue can now accommodate around 1,000 people in a banquet setting or 1,700 in cocktail configuration, with catering facilities available, making it suitable for major community functions such as weddings and cultural festivals. While it is not a dedicated multicultural facility, the multicultural community is given priority access to bookings, except during major events such as Summernats and the Royal Canberra Show. The pavilion has already hosted important multicultural events, including the ACT government's Diwali reception last year, and the AusIndia Fair organised by FINACT in May this year.

Through Infrastructure Canberra, the ACT government also provides heavily subsidised concessional rates for community groups hiring these and other government facilities across the entirety of the ACT. To meet community needs across Canberra, ACT public schools also make their facilities available for hire outside school hours. These spaces are affordable, local and help strengthen schools as important community hubs, particularly for multicultural groups.

I understand that the motion raises some concerns, particularly in relation to Theo Notaras, which I would like to address. I have heard directly from the multicultural community that the centre is a much-valued asset. It is centrally located, well used, and home to key services. Co-locating these organisations provides significant benefits and

improves accessibility for community members. While I acknowledge that the centre cannot meet every need on its own—it has never intended to—it continues to play an essential role in our multicultural infrastructure.

In regard to the Fitzroy Pavilion upgrades, consultation occurred with the former Multicultural Advisory Council in December 2022, and the new Ministerial Advisory Council for Multiculturalism in September 2023. This type of consultation is essential and will continue as we plan for future projects that support our community.

Of course, meeting the needs of any community does require collaboration. The ACT government cannot achieve positive outcomes alone. We rely on the strength of our partnerships with multicultural groups—partnerships that will only continue to grow as we work to make Canberra an even better place to live.

I would also like to provide some further information with regard to the extensive consultation that took place in developing the Gungahlin Community Centre. Over five months, the government conducted a comprehensive engagement process, including: 22 face-to-face or online meetings with key stakeholders, including community service providers and government agencies, two workshops with Gungahlin region service providers to identify project aspirations and spatial needs, an online survey for community service provider users, a public online workshop with the Gungahlin community, site tours of seven comparable community facilities across Canberra, two presentations to the Gungahlin Community Council, and a presentation to the United Ngunnawal Elders Council.

The stakeholders that were consulted included the ACT Youth Coalition, ACTCOSS, Belco Arts, Barnardos, BAPS, Carers ACT, Canberra Muslim Community Inc, Common Ground, Communities@Work, CODA ACT, Druk Namgyel Chhoeling Buddhist Centre, Gungahlin Community Council, headspace, Menslink, Multicultural Hub, Northside Community Service, PCYC, Playgroups ACT, Relationships Australia, the Tuggeranong Arts Centre Messengers Program, the United Ngunnawal Elders Council, and the University of Canberra.

Finally, I would like to clarify the process for making community-zoned land available for purchase. This involves a two-stage sale process to ensure that allocations are equitable and transparent. It allows government to consider all interested community organisations and identify those best placed to deliver sustainable projects that benefit the broader community.

In closing, I again thank Ms Barry for bringing this motion forward and for her engagement in addressing the concerns I raised with the original motion. I look forward to continuing to work constructively with all members in this place to support and strengthen our multicultural community.

MS CARRICK (Murrumbidgee) (3.19): I rise today in support of Ms Barry's motion, particularly the gap analysis with respect to the needs for community facilities. Last weekend I had the pleasure of attending a Diwali celebration in the new suburb of Whitlam. The event was vibrant and joyful, but it was held in a car park, simply because there are no suitable facilities available in the area. This is not just inconvenient; it is a clear signal that we are falling short in providing the infrastructure that our multicultural

communities need and deserve.

It is essential that multicultural communities have access to appropriate spaces for gatherings, celebrations and connection. These spaces are not luxuries; they are vital to fostering inclusion, wellbeing and community engagement.

For three consecutive elections, Labor has committed to delivering a new community centre in Woden, but here we are, still waiting for something to happen. We also have multiple private developers proposing to include community facilities within larger developments. While this may seem promising, we must ensure that any such facilities are governed appropriately. They must be run in the interests of local communities, not at the discretion of private developers.

Our communities are ready for social infrastructure to enable the social development of their community.

MR BRADDOCK(Yerrabi) (3.21): I am pleased that Ms Barry has brought forward this motion today, and I am grateful for the chance to contribute to the debate. I, like other Greens MLAs, have also heard from multicultural stakeholders that they are struggling to find spaces to host their events. This is for a variety of reasons, including insufficient capacity, insufficient parking and inadequate cooking facilities. They are also struggling with the rising costs, and venues being in need of refurbishment and repairs.

Canberra prides itself on being an inclusive city, one where we welcome and celebrate the customs, traditions, arts and culture from all corners of the globe. Here in the Assembly, no matter what our political persuasion is, I think we pride ourselves on responding to the problems that people bring to us and helping them to solve them. We are united in wanting to make Canberra a better place for everyone.

I would argue that, in addition to our general responsibility to provide safe and affordable spaces for community groups of all kinds, we have a particular responsibility in the current global and national environment to do so for our fellow Canberrans from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.

Mr Assistant Speaker, have you looked at the news headlines lately? In the past week we have seen so-called March for Australia protests that were provocatively organised by far right figures who promoted white nationalist ideas, including openly pro-Nazi content. These protests were not only attended by several thousand people but were supported by sitting federal Australian politicians, including senators from Bob Katter's Australian Party, former Liberal Gerard Rennick's People First Party, and One Nation.

The terrifying alt-right trends we are seeing gaining momentum here at home are reflective of a larger global trend. Several European countries are seeing growth in the vote share going to far right parties. We have also seen the Vice President and Speaker of the House in the USA refuse to condemn a recently linked series of blatantly racist, sexist, homophobic and anti-Semitic texts from Republicans, including a sitting state senator, basically on the grounds that "boys will be boys".

These global shifts are leaving many in our multicultural community feeling increasingly isolated and unsafe. The least we can do is ensure they have accessible,

welcoming spaces to gather, connect and feel supported. It is our responsibility to make sure Canberra's multicultural communities feel at home, safe and able to meet for gatherings and celebrations in community facilities that are fit for purpose.

Accordingly, I am pleased to say that the Greens will be supportive of the motion, and I am glad that Ms Barry and the Labor Party were able to come to agreement on a series of amendments.

MS STEPHEN-SMITH (Kurrajong—Minister for Health, Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Finance and Minister for the Public Service) (3.24): I want to speak very briefly, having regard to my responsibility for Infrastructure Canberra's Places and Spaces, which manages dozens and dozens—indeed scores—of community facilities across the city. These facilities are operated on behalf of government, in many cases by community organisations, including multicultural groups.

I want to assure Ms Barry and the Assembly that pricing for event hiring reflects that these are community facilities, and costs are minimised to accommodate a wide variety of user groups. As Ms Barry may be aware, information about venues that can be hired, including hire costs and amenities, is located on the Infrastructure Canberra web page.

As has been noted, ACT public schools also make spaces available for hire to community organisations outside school hours. I would note that the ACT government is not the only provider of facilities to community groups. There are a range of commercial facilities and facilities that are owned or leased by community organisations, religious bodies and others that also provide space for community to gather.

It is important to recognise that Places and Spaces in the ACT government works really hard to ensure that hiring costs are kept to a minimum, but if we do not cover costs, in managing our facilities, somebody else is paying for that. The Canberra Liberals have an ongoing record of talking about the budget and deficit, and of coming into this place with motions that require further expenditure of taxpayers' money on a range of things. That is not to say that this is not a worthy objective to ensure that community groups, including multicultural community groups, can access places and spaces at affordable rates.

At least half of the cabinet are or have been ministers for multicultural affairs. We all know these communities well. We have all spent many days and hours at community events, and we all very much appreciate the valuable contribution of our multicultural groups and organisations to the ACT community, the rich diversity of offerings across our community and how much having this diversity of activity enriches the ACT community. None of us take that for granted, and all of us appreciate the welcome that we receive from the diverse communities who call Canberra home.

I will make a couple of specific points in relation to Infrastructure Canberra. Infrastructure Canberra has been undertaking a review of property allocation, and a new policy is currently being considered by government. This new policy will have a focus on addressing need, rather than the first-come-first-served approach that has traditionally been used. Community consultation on the allocation policy will commence following government review.

Assuming that this motion passes the Assembly, and it seems that it will, I want to join others in thanking our staff, our offices and everybody in the chamber for the way that they have worked together collaboratively on this. Infrastructure Canberra will happily work with the Office of Multicultural Affairs following their survey to map identified needs, and to align those with current and planned facilities to inform how we address the current and future needs of the community.

I need to address one specific element of Ms Barry's motion, around Gungahlin Community Centre. Ms Barry indicated that community consultation on the Gungahlin Community Centre was limited. I want to put on record that engagement events were conducted over a five-month period on the development of the community centre. Twenty-two face-to-face and online meetings were held with key stakeholders, including community service providers and ACT government agencies.

There were two workshops with Gungahlin region community service providers to confirm project aspirations and specific spatial requirements. There was an online survey for community service provider users of the building. There was an online public workshop with the Gungahlin community panel. There were site tours of seven comparable community facilities in Canberra, two presentations to the Gungahlin Community Council and a presentation to the United Ngunnawal Elders Council.

Stakeholders who were consulted included ACT Youth Coalition, ACTCOSS, Belco Arts, Barnardos, BAPS Swaminarayan Santha Australia, Carers ACT, Canberra Muslim Community Inc, Common Ground, Communities@work, COTA ACT, Druk Namgyel Chhoeling Buddhist Centre, Gungahlin Community Council, headspace, Menslink, Multicultural Hub, Northside Community Service, PCYC, Playgroups ACT, Relationships Australia, Tuggeranong Arts Centre Messengers Program, United Ngunnawal Elders Council and the University of Canberra.

I take Ms Barry's point that Gungahlin is home to many multicultural organisations and communities, but I think it is unreasonable of her to make the assertion that there was limited consultation on the development of Gungahlin Community Centre. Of course, construction is underway, and I am very pleased that that commitment is being delivered.

I can assure Ms Barry that it is always not only our intention but our practice to engage closely with local communities in all of their diversity. I join with Mr Pettersson in calling on Ms Barry, when she is bringing forward motions like this, to realise that this is an area where, generally speaking, when it comes to multicultural affairs, the Assembly works collaboratively together. We all value our multicultural community, and it is disappointing to misrepresent the situation or to cast aspersions on ministers and other members of the Assembly when we could be joining together to support our multicultural community, which we will be doing, in supporting this motion.

MS BARRY (Ginninderra) (3.32): In closing, I want to thank everyone who has participated in this debate. I want to thank Ms Carrick for her contribution. I want to thank Mr Braddock for his contribution and Minister Stephen-Smith and Minister Petterson. I think it is really important that I address a few comments that have been made, or a few misrepresentations that have been made, particularly around the

comments made by Mr Pettersson and repeated by Ms Stephen-Smith about my assertions regarding the minister. The *Hansard* record would show that what I said was “communities tell me”. This is not what I am saying; it is what the communities are telling me.

Mr Cocks: It is not made up.

MS BARRY: It is not made up; they are telling me. This is what they are saying. I am bringing the views of the community to the Assembly. If you intend not to speak to me and you are looking for a reason not to, that is completely up to you. But that is what communities are telling me. I am not making it up.

In relation to Ms Stephen-Smith’s comments around consultation with the communities on the Gungahlin Community Centre, again, the comments are: “Communities told me that there were limited consultations, particularly with the multicultural community”. Just by running through the communities that you have mentioned, there are only two multicultural communities in that group—two or three. BAP is a different community organisation to, for example, the African community, the Italian community and the other big communities that exist in the ACT and in Gungahlin particularly.

That is why I asked the question yesterday about how the minister engages with peak bodies. It could be—and it seems that that is what is happening here—that there are multiple representations by one multicultural community of organisations. They could have three organisations, but they are representing one community. As I have said a few times in this place, communities are static but organisations change. So that is why I asked the question yesterday: how do you engage with the peak organisations? Your response to me yesterday at question time was that you engage with everybody. If you are doing that, how do you then know that you are getting the views across the multicultural community centres?

Again, I am grateful that we got to where we got to, and I thank everybody for their contributions and comments. But I thought it was really important to put that on the record—that this is not coming from me; it is coming from the communities. Again, I thank everyone for their contribution.

Mr Pettersson: I raise a point of order. Under standing order 55, personal reflections, all imputations of improper motives and all personal reflections on members shall be considered highly disorderly. I would ask that you review the transcript.

MR ASSISTANT SPEAKER: That will be reviewed, and I will have a conversation with the Speaker as well about responding to your point of order.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Digital driving licences—provision

MR COCKS (Murrumbidgee) (3.35): I seek leave to amend my motion.

Leave granted.

MR COCKS: I move:

That this Assembly:

(1) notes that:

- (a) a growing number of Australian jurisdictions already offer digital driver licences, including South Australia, New South Wales, Queensland and Victoria;
- (b) customer uptake and satisfaction in NSW has been high, with Service NSW reporting more than 4.5 million digital driver's licences and 76 percent uptake by 30 June 2023, with satisfaction consistently above 92 percent;
- (c) digital licences can increase convenience for residents, reduce the need to carry physical cards, and enable easier authentication, which can reduce checking burden on police, licensed venues and other verifiers;
- (d) cybersecurity experts have suggested digital licensing could reduce risk of identity fraud provided compliance with national and international standards;
- (e) the ACT can leverage other jurisdictions' experience, existing verification technology and emerging national standards, and, subject to lawful data-sharing arrangements, pursue interoperability to streamline checks on visiting interstate licence-holders, especially from NSW; and
- (f) implementation choices carry different cost, privacy, data-governance, user-experience and delivery-risk profiles, and that a staged, opt-in rollout with strong privacy protections and accessibility features is considered best practice;

(2) further notes that:

- (a) the Government indicated in 2022 that it would take a "wait and see" approach to digital driver licensing while other jurisdictions progressed their programs; and
- (b) there have been over eight years of successful digital licensing programs across the country for the ACT to draw from; and

(3) calls on the Government to:

- (a) undertake a comparative assessment of digital driver licensing models used in NSW, Victoria, Queensland and South Australia, including security architecture verification methods, privacy safeguards, offline contingencies, accessibility features, and legislative frameworks;
- (b) identify delivery options suitable for the ACT, including the feasibility of contractible service components, and provide indicative costs and timelines;
- (c) engage with relevant agencies in NSW, Victoria, Queensland and South Australia to scope technical interoperability and lawful data-sharing/verification arrangements to support cross-border enforcement and venue acceptance in the ACT;
- (d) prepare any necessary legislative and regulatory amendments to recognise and govern ACT digital driver licences and verification, including offence, evidence and privacy settings, and a clear policy on choice to continue using physical cards; and

- (e) report back to the Assembly by 30 May 2026 with findings, a preferred delivery pathway, draft legislative changes and an implementation schedule for an opt-in pilot followed by staged rollout.

Imagine never digging through your wallet or searching the house to find your licence again. Imagine heading out with friends, getting to a venue and your ID is at your fingertips, because you have it right there on your phone.

A digital licence is a convenient, easy to use, easy to verify and, importantly, secure option that can make your life easier. When you go out, you do not always have the things that we used to carry around in our wallets and in our purses. I do not know about you, but my wallet tends to be a little overloaded. We have so many cards, and every sector of the economy has been moving towards digitisation to make things more convenient for consumers. It just makes sense. It makes sense to be able to choose a digital option. You can keep the physical card if you prefer but, being able to choose a digital option, is convenience without compromise, with privacy built in from day one.

What is more, when it comes to digital licences, the technology and the systems to deliver them already exist. They are being used just over the border where they have been working with digital licences since 2018. Just over the border, in Queanbeyan, people have had access to digital driver licences for years. It is about time Canberra caught up. This motion is not just about digitising a plastic card; it is about doing something that is practical, overdue and, quite frankly, common sense.

Digital drivers licences were introduced in South Australia in 2017. In New South Wales, they introduced legislation in 2018 and, by mid-2023, over 4.5 million New South Wales residents had opted in, with a satisfaction rate consistently above 92 per cent. Queensland and Victoria are on board. But here we are in the ACT, still waiting. I get it—the government wanted to take a “wait and see” approach. They said that in 2022. But the waiting has been done. The seeing has been done. The technology exists. The privacy settings exist. The security exists and the adoption rate and the satisfaction rates speak for themselves. But the territory is still behind. Canberrans are already asking, “Why could I get a digital licence in Sydney or Adelaide, why could I get a digital licence in Victoria, why could I get a digital licence in Queanbeyan, but not in Canberra? Why are we the nation’s capital but lagging behind on digital service delivery?”

The good news is that we do not have to start from scratch. We do not need to reinvent the wheel here. We can compare, we can partner and we can learn. We have got four live models across Australia. They have already solved the big questions about security, verification, accessibility and privacy. We just need to apply those lessons here in the ACT. That is why this motion calls on the government to do precisely that: a proper consultative, comparative assessment. Look at what works and avoid what does not; minimise cost; maximise reliability; reduce cost; and reduce risk.

We can and should leverage existing technology to reduce delivery time and avoid the kind of costly bespoke blowouts that this government is infamous for. Let’s be honest: Labor has a diabolical track record when it comes to some of these digital projects. From the DHR fiasco that the Auditor-General was out there talking about recently, to the HR system and everything in between, time and again we hear that this government

has proven it can take simple ideas and make them expensive, slow and dysfunctional by going bespoke.

That is why this motion includes very, very clear instructions: get expert advice; prioritise choice, security and privacy; work with other jurisdictions who have already implemented this successfully and who have already solved the problems; and come back to this Assembly with a preferred model by the end of next year. In other words, make it foolproof. The people of Canberra deserve digital innovations that are implemented well, on time and practically to make their lives better without the digital disasters we have seen in other spaces.

Let me be very clear: this is not about forcing people to go digital; this is pro-consumer choice policy. If you want to keep your physical card, great; you can. If you want to opt in for a digital licence, great; it will be there for you. But the point is that you should have the option. Right now, Canberrans do not.

We talk a lot in this place about equity and accessibility, and here is a chance to deliver it. Digital licences do not just benefit tech-savvy consumers; they help young people, who rely on their phones for everything; parents, who want fewer cards to juggle; people like me, who end up with extremely thick wallets and need to reduce the load; licensed venues, who want faster, secure age checks; police, who need efficient verification tools; and seniors and travellers, who want that convenience without losing security. It just makes sense. At its heart, this is about building a better Canberra through smarter government.

I would like to thank everyone who has reached out to me in support of this proposal and everyone who has worked with me to build on it. I do not know how many iterations we went through—six or seven?—but, we have landed at a place, with the amendment I brought today, that builds on and does not detract from the motion that I lodged.

This motion reflects the policy direction that the Canberra Liberals have been advocating for for some time. I would like to acknowledge that it also reflects the hard policy work by our ordinary members. This is not just MLAs driving the agenda; the original idea was driven throughout the whole party membership, from the Young Liberals to our divisional policy meeting earlier this year—and I am proud to bring it into this chamber, not with posturing but with constructive steps. This motion ticks every box. It is backed by real-world evidence. It is focused on service delivery; it is fiscally responsible; it reflects individual choice; it can improve safety, convenience and verification; and, most of all, it is putting people first.

I expect the government might, as they have been wont to do on other days, take a swipe about potential costs. But let's be very clear: this would be building on the work of other states. It would be using their hard work, so that we can save money compared with a bespoke project and, once in place, this has potential to save on a range of costs into the future. This is a sensible, practical step towards a better, more convenient future for Canberrans. This is convenience without compromise, with privacy built in from day one—modern, practical services that make everyday life easier. I commend my motion to the Assembly.

MS STEPHEN-SMITH (Kurrajong—Minister for Health, Minister for Mental Health,

Minister for Finance and Minister for the Public Service) (3.45): Mr Cocks gave a very nice speech about how simple and straightforward this all is. I want to start by thanking Mr Cocks and his office and Greens' members and their staff for the collaborative approach that has been taken on this motion in order to get to a point where Mr Cocks could amend his own motion. My understanding is that it will be agreed in a tripartisan way, which is really important because, as Mr Cocks indicated, we are talking about a potential very significant investment of taxpayers' dollars to improve services for our community, which is something that we all agree we would like to do. Mr Braddock and Miss Nuttall and their offices have worked really closely with my office, as well as with the offices of Mr Cocks and Ms Cheyne, on this motion.

There is no doubt that a digital driver's licence would provide a convenient way for many people to carry and display their driver's licence. I would like one, just as I now carry my Medicare card in digital form. The purpose of a digital driver's licence can be summarised as: "To meet the legal obligation to carry a driver's licence when operating a motor vehicle, to meet the legal obligation to present a driver's licence to a police officer when requested, and as a means of proving identity in the community." If it does not meet those requirements, a digital driver's licence will not replace a card. So it is really important that a digital driver's licence is able to meet all three of those requirements.

The ACT government is committed to delivering more ACT government services online, and we have been doing that increasingly. That includes exploring the opportunity to make digital licences available to our community. While the government is really happy to support the motion as amended by Mr Cocks, there are some clarifications in relation to some of the things that have been noted and some of the things that Mr Cocks said in his contribution that I would like to touch on.

It is true that most Australian jurisdictions have digital, or mobile, driver's licences in place or are developing them. The ACT has established close working ties with each of those jurisdictions to understand the current state of the various technologies. We welcome the push from the Assembly to continue this work to ensure we understand the challenges that they have needed to overcome while developing their digital licences before making the significant investment decision to establish our own. It is important to note that acceptance and use of digital driver's licences in other jurisdictions varies. Most jurisdictions still require the plastic card for presentation to police as and when it is required by them, and private sector confidence in mobile driver's licences as a valid ID remains low.

Interjurisdictional acceptance of mobile driver's licences is inconsistent, mainly due to differing technical standards and lack of systems or training for interstate police to recognise and trust other jurisdictions' mobile licences. For example, while New South Wales offers a digital driver's licence, it is not universally recognised by other law enforcement agencies across Australia, including the ACT, as a valid form of identification.

Mr Cocks: I reckon we could fix that.

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: Mr Cocks has just said we could fix that, but that requires a level of technical capacity for all our police, and our community as well, to verify a

New South Wales digital driver's licence. As a form of identification in a bar or a pub, how do we roll out the training for another state or territory's driver's licence? Mr Cocks seems to think these are really simple, straightforward issues, whereas, in fact, they are extremely technically challenging, and they are challenging in terms of community engagement. As I mentioned earlier, New South Wales digital driver's licences are not necessarily accepted as a valid form of identification across their own community.

The ACT government is actively engaged in a significant national initiative led by digital and data ministers, which I am now a member of, and their supporting officials. This work is focused on establishing consistent, secure and interoperable digital identity processes across jurisdictions. That is something that we can all agree is vital in the longer term if we all adopt digital identification. Specifically, digital and data ministers have agreed to the adoption of ISO 18013-5 as the appropriate standard. Queensland is the only state with a fully ISO 18013-5-compliant mobile driver's licence. So we are in a position where we cannot both align with NSW, which would clearly be our preference as an island within New South Wales, and comply with ISO 18013-5, as agreed by digital and data ministers and as is clearly going to be the long-term objective.

As a small jurisdiction, we have been doing exactly what Mr Cocks said he wanted in his speech—ensuring we do it once and do it right. Colloquially—and some may be too young to remember this—we want to avoid investing in a Beta video recorder just as we realise that the rest of the world is moving to VHS as the standard. Mr Cocks's motion notes the benefit of digital licences for reducing identity fraud, and that can be true, provided there is adherence to national and international standards. It is important to note that licences could reduce risk of identity fraud, provided they are implemented as an alternative to existing verification processes with robust features. In other words, digital licences are not inherently more secure. It is the security features within the digital licence that will provide the improvements that Mr Cocks describes. Ensuring that our future digital licences provide robust protections for Canberrans from identity theft and identity fraud is a key consideration of this work.

As the government has previously indicated, our intention has been to await national agreement on these questions before we make significant investment decisions to proceed with our own mobile driver's licence. Our objective is to align with nationally consistent standards. This approach will support cross-jurisdictional recognition and avoid duplication or rework, which is exactly the kind of potential waste that Mr Cocks is seeking for us to avoid. We are also seeking to avoid that. We are committed to contributing to the national framework and leveraging the experiences of other jurisdictions, but, as I said, those other jurisdictions currently all operate on a different standard. So which one? And how do we pick up their technology?

In terms of picking up other jurisdictions' technology, I would say to Mr Cocks that we have been criticised heavily for the Digital Health Record, but other jurisdictions have had significant failures in delivering electronic medical records on time and on budget. It is good that we did not partner with the Northern Territory, which has spent hundreds of millions of dollars on a failed outcome. It entirely failed to deliver an electronic medical records system. And it is good that we did not partner with Queensland on the rollout of their public transport technology, which we considered doing, because that project has not run to time and, as I understand it, not to budget. So it does not always

pay for the ACT, as a small jurisdiction, to simply rely on a larger jurisdiction and hope for the best.

Our objective, as I have said, is to align with nationally consistent standards, and we are committed to contributing to the national framework. Our focus is on delivering community-facing digital services that are robust, secure, scalable and recognised nationwide. There is a growing expectation in Canberra that the ACT should have a mobile driver's licence—we completely recognise that—but there is also an expectation from the Canberrans that this technology will be interoperable with other states. That is what will drive future adoption.

The ACT government will continue our work to explore the best way to deliver a digital licence that Canberrans can trust, rely on and use not just in the ACT but also around the country. This will require close collaboration with other states, territories and the commonwealth. We look forward to reporting back to the Assembly no later than the end of 2026 on this work. It is work that is really exciting and it is work that we agree is important, but it cannot be done in isolation and it must be done in a way that is futureproof.

MR BRADDOCK (Yerrabi) (3.55): I rise today in support of the motion introduced by Mr Cocks. I am really grateful he brought it forward for debate. As he outlined, there are various promising dimensions to the ACT's consideration of a digital driver's licence. If done well, a digital ID system has the potential to offer significant privacy benefits, including improving both security and user control over personal information. Drawing on precedents from other jurisdictions provides a potential roadmap for sensible implementation, provided we also learn from the mistakes of those other jurisdictions.

The ACT Greens are committed to a future where privacy is respected, technology is used ethically, and digital systems benefit society, rather than deepening inequality or eroding trust in our institutions. In this regard, we support the motion's key focus on privacy protections. We also encourage the prioritisation of an inclusive digital ID system that, through thorough assessment and planning, does not amplify any existing digital divides. If people cannot access a digital ID or choose not to have one, they must still be able to access critical services and participate fully in social and economic life. For this system to work, it needs a strong social licence, which can only be achieved by ensuring that accessible alternatives are available to all. Importantly, the uncritical use of any biometric data, particularly facial recognition, holds the risk of perpetuating unconscious bias. This is something that AI-powered development has been doing, and it is a trap to be very wary of. It is vital that we have a clear plan to address these potential issues from the outset, which is something that can be prioritised through undertaking rigorous investigation and comparative assessment of other states' models and their associated successes and faults.

I take on board the minister's comments in terms of the dangers that are sometimes involved in ICT projects, particularly when emulating other jurisdictions. I also note there are risks associated with our own bespoke ICT approaches. We have seen those play out here. I hope the government are acutely aware of how they would manage this ICT project given the significance it will have.

I support Mr Cocks's call for the government to begin the initial assessment while keeping these considerations in mind. That way, accessibility, equity and privacy are central to any prospective implementation.

MS BARRY (Ginninderra) (3.58): I too rise to speak to this motion. I thank Mr Cocks for bringing this important motion before the Assembly. This proposal essentially seeks to bring Canberra in line with modern Australia and ask the question: why is it that drivers in this so-called progressive, modern government must carry a physical licence when we are surrounded by the residents of Yass and Queanbeyan, who have access to digital licences in New South Wales?

Digital licences are popular with young generations that have grown up with digital technology. Over 80 per cent of New South Wales drivers were using digital licences in 2023. This is not surprising as the smartphone is increasingly becoming the focal point of many of our lives. Many Canberrans no longer carry cash, and plastic cards are increasingly replaced by a digital wallet. Many young people no longer carry a physical wallet, meaning they can be caught out in Canberra by not having their plastic driver's licence with them when stopped by police. Showing a digital photo on your phone will not be accepted by police. Drivers may be issued a fine of one penalty unit, or \$180, in 2025. Bizarrely, this also applies to digital driver's licences lawfully issued interstate. A driver who lives in Queanbeyan and drives to work in Canberra is in the ridiculous situation of driving lawfully until they hit the ACT border. They then face a fine for not having a physical card when they cross into this jurisdiction. A tourist from Queensland, Victoria or South Australia who drives to Canberra could easily be caught out by not knowing our outdated licensing rules. Fining people in these circumstances simply does not make sense. We should, at the very minimum, consider legislation that ensures that digital licence holders are not fined in these circumstances.

Turning to the modalities of implementing this proposal, some might say that developing software to support a digital licence scheme is costly and not justifiable—this was actually mentioned by the minister—particularly in the context of decades of financial mismanagement in the ACT and our crippling debt. The minister has mentioned a few times how we bring forward motions around expenditure but also criticise the government for its bottom line.

Beyond convenience for drivers, there are good reasons why a digital licence is justified. There is potentially even a net financial benefit to the community. Benefits include not losing the licence, reducing fraud and identity theft, and no cost for replacing cards. A digital licence is always up-to-date, meaning police can rely on address details, permissions and validity dates, which may be outdated on a physical card. It contributes to fraud reduction, as physical cards are easy to fake or alter. It enables progressive security enhancement to be rolled out seamlessly across the system. A digital licence can be integrated with other digital credentials, such as a boat licence, trailer registration, and potentially the Working with Vulnerable People card or, potentially in the future, firearm licensing. For governments, there are cost savings in not running the manual issuing process and the physical production of licences. There are potential cost savings from the automation of compliance checks. A Service NSW report in February 2023 noted that their digital licence program had hit \$20 million in benefits realised, with over 900,000 hours of customer and business time saved in application processes.

We all recognise that Canberra is a small jurisdiction that does not have the economy of scale that New South Wales, Queensland and Victoria enjoy. We need to be very careful when considering investments in information technology. There are no development shortcuts. If you want to deliver quality outcomes, as Labor have discovered with their investment in the MyWay+ system, there are no shortcuts to doing that. Creating a bespoke system is costly. Taking shortcuts with development risks system instability and the potential for security weakness. Rushing out a bespoke IT system without appropriate testing is a recipe for chaos and mayhem.

We know that digital licence systems are expensive. New South Wales and Queensland systems were reported to cost between \$50 million to \$60 million to develop; however, some media reports put the total cost at \$300 million. It is unlikely that it would be cost-effective for the ACT to go down that road and develop its own system, but there are options, as Mr Cocks highlighted, and the minister highlighted some of the limitations to those options. However, we believe that those options could include a contractual arrangement with New South Wales to use their existing system or add an additional model based on their system for ACT licensing. It is an option that could be explored. It could include similar arrangements with Queensland, Victoria or South Australia, to build on their systems. Mr Cocks's motion calls on the government to investigate all these options and provide advice to the Assembly of indicative costs and timelines. For these reasons, I strongly support this motion. It would align the ACT with developments in eastern mainland states. Change is key to growth. Without it, you will never know what opportunities you have sacrificed. This proposal is a sensible suggestion that I suspect will be supported by the vast majority of Canberrans.

Once again, I thank Mr Cocks for bringing forward this motion. I commend his motion to the Assembly.

MS CHEYNE (Ginninderra—Manager of Government Business, Attorney-General, Minister for Human Rights, Minister for City and Government Services and Minister for the Night-Time Economy) (4.04): I will speak briefly, because I think we are all in furious agreement and we are starting to say the same things as each other.

We know, from the examples of Apple Pay and virtual bank cards, that digital solutions to everyday transactions and issues obviously provide the community with convenience, and they experience a great level of support. Although not on the same scale of everyday use, of course, this is no different when it comes to digital drivers licences. I know it is something that many members of the community are passionate about. There are lots of questions as to when, and why it is taking so long. I think I can speak for everyone in this place when I say that we would love it to have happened yesterday, yet it has not. I can go to that to some degree.

I would note that, of course, we are proud of our nation-leading reforms in many areas, and particularly in the legislative space. Our size and our smaller government allow us to be agile and to move quickly. But I think we have all recognised that this does not necessarily extend to the tech space, where our capital and our capacity to trial technologies are more limited. Mr Cocks and I are in agreement about our capacity limitations in the tech space, as much as I differ from and indeed reject his characterisations as to why, which I am sure he appreciates.

Allowing other states with the available capital and capacity to trial technologies first makes sense, especially on issues like this, where changes would be affecting the majority of our population, so we really need to get it right. As Ms Barry eloquently put it, there have been significant costs incurred by other states when implementing these technologies. If they are willing to bear it first, that is great; we will happily piggyback on them and, hopefully, at a much cheaper price.

With respect to where we are at now, with several states having gone it alone, and with our licence system being federated, it means that each digital driver licence framework differs between jurisdictions. Of course, that immediately raises questions about interoperability across the country. While New South Wales digital driver licences are commonplace, and they are inherently linked to and accepted within the Service NSW platform, the licence is accepted inconsistently as a valid form of ID in other states. As Minister Stephen-Smith rightly pointed out, it depends on the circumstances and the venue as to whether it is accepted in New South Wales.

Actually, it is very clear, even in the terms and conditions of the digital driver licence in New South Wales, that it does not replace your physical card. You only have a digital driver licence if you have a driver licence issued to you. Indeed, under the heading “Use and Misuse of the DDL” it reads:

You must continue to hold and carry your NSW Driver Licence Card at all times when you are driving outside of NSW. It may take some time before all organisations will be ready to accept a DDL. To ensure that you are not inconvenienced, you should carry your NSW Driver Licence Card.

It is not one or the other. Certainly, at this stage it is about choice. Again, I appreciate that we all want the choice in this place, but it is worth recognising that, even within New South Wales, updating every single system that relies on forms of identification for verification purposes is expensive and incremental. Even the terms and conditions of the New South Wales licence stress that it is up to venues, if they are participating in accepting a digital driver licence.

When it comes to where we are at, of course, one of those reasons is relating to that interoperability. In the ACT we are particularly mindful of the need for national consistency, being a jurisdiction entirely within another jurisdiction and having our own porous borders. For us, there are very few people who would ever not travel outside the ACT, so understanding what will be accepted or not, and us moving to be aligned with that, is important.

That goes very clearly to the points that Minister Stephen-Smith raised before, about having a standard digital trust framework across Australia. I know that Austroads is leading that. We are not at that point with the ISO yet; again, as Minister Stephen-Smith pointed out, most other states are not, either. That, as the first step, effectively gives us the same basis or playing field across a digital environment to work from. I think that takes us to what is the most sensible investment.

Finally, it is worth noting that Access Canberra are incredibly agile in the tech space. Especially when we are trying to find solutions, they do move quickly. It is a

particularly stark reflection to make because it does underline that, if we could, we would. It is difficult while we do not have that interoperability and national consistency, but all the signs are there.

While I appreciate that it has been painful for Mr Cocks to undergo numerous amendments and iterations to his motion, it is really pleasing that we have been able to land on something that does have tripartisan—and, I assume, independent—agreement. I thank him, genuinely and sincerely, for putting in that effort and work. I look forward to Minister Stephen-Smith reporting back in the last sitting week in 2026, and I will support her through that.

MISS NUTTALL (Brindabella) (4.12): I will speak very briefly to the substance of the amendments to the motion. As members have mentioned, these are the product of good-faith collaboration across offices. I would also like to thank Mr Cocks for incorporating that additional element that I was looking for into what is already a good motion that I strongly support.

Anyone with the experience of leaving essential things in their home, office or car can see the merits of a digital ID option—take it from an ADHDer. However, it is important to extend the scope of the motion to ensure that some of the most vulnerable Canberrans can also benefit from the system. The proof-of-age card system is an essential one and it should be given all the same accessibility features that a digital drivers licence has.

We live in a city with a flawed but still mostly functional public transport system. There are many Canberrans who grew up without an opportunity to learn to drive, due to any number of barriers, from time to ability and cost—so very many things. For some people, not getting their licence is a choice. For others, it is not an option that they have ever had.

We are also a city where a large number of young people come here from all around Australia, and they may well have lived in cities where getting a licence is far less common than here. I imagine most of us have heard the horror stories of trying to drive through Melbourne's city centre. I cannot imagine most people growing up in that area would see a need for a licence. Hook turns terrify me. Even if students or young professionals moving here intend to get their licence, they should have a form of ID that does not require a specific skill set in the interim.

Proof-of-age cards have no expiry date, I believe—I hope the minister will correct me if I am wrong—for anyone over 18 and, once issued, you basically have them forever. I firmly believe they will be far easier to issue than drivers licences, as there is no need continuously to update them in the same way. I do not think this interferes at all with the intent of Mr Cocks's motion, and I firmly believe that these amendments will expand the benefits of this program to even more Canberrans.

MR COCKS (Murrumbidgee) (4.14): In closing, I have to say that it has been stark—the contrast in approach by different members in this building today. On the one hand, we had a hugely positive contribution from the Greens, in building on a very sensible motion by just expanding it to proof-of-age cards. What a sensible way to go. It is not an accusation that I will level at the Greens very often, but it is a sensible improvement on a good Canberra Liberals policy. We had Ms Barry enthusiastically supporting a

very sensible policy.

It is important to realise and reflect that this is not something new. We have been talking about this for some time. Mr Cain has been talking about this since 2022, when the government said that it would wait and see. This is a reform that is enthusiastically embraced by so many people across our community and across this chamber.

The contribution from one minister was a little bit stark. We heard nothing but negatives. On a positive story, we got nothing but negatives. The government thinks, “It might be a bit too hard; it seems a little bit complex.” We heard, interestingly, all sorts of warnings about how difficult it might be to navigate, and we heard a false equivalence regarding a digital drivers licence, which is a proven technology, successfully implemented in multiple states. There are multiple options for people to partner with.

Maybe it is a little bit like Northern Territory Labor’s failed electronic medical records. Maybe we would be running the same risk by partnering with other jurisdictions on technologies as if we had signed up to that program so many years ago.

The level of negativity that that minister managed to bring to a positive debate was astounding. People across Canberra want to see this change. They have been looking for it for a long time. It is about time that the government got it done, and it sounds like we are going to have that happen. Gee, I hope that, when she goes into that negotiating room, she brings a little bit more enthusiasm to the possibilities for a positive future that this could bring than she brought to the debate today.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Statements by members

Higgins—Fullagar Crescent—speeding

MR CAIN (Ginninderra) (4.17): I rise today to speak about a serious safety concern raised by many of the residents in Higgins—speeding along Fullagar Crescent. Fullagar Crescent is a major arterial road that connects our community. It services the Higgins shops, the retirement village The Henry, the Higgins oval, where local children and community sports teams gather, a childcare centre, and numerous family homes. Despite its importance, it has become a danger zone to many, due to reckless speeding.

While out doorknocking over the last month or so, residents have consistently told me that speeding on Fullagar Crescent is one of their concerns. Parents park along the street each morning to drop their children at child care, and on weekends the road is lined with cars as families attend games at the oval. This often leaves the road narrow and visibility limited, a dangerous mix when drivers speed. It would only take a moment’s distraction for tragedy to strike.

I strongly urge the government to act immediately and to undertake a proper traffic study of Fullagar Crescent, and to seriously consider installing traffic calming measures before someone gets hurt. This is preventable. I ask the government to undertake such a survey and look at measures to improve safety along this important road.

War Widows Day

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) (4.19): I rise today to affirm the ACT government's commitment to formally recognise War Widows Day on 19 October each year. It is a day which honours the resilience and strength of those who have lost loved ones in service to our nation.

War Widows Day recognises the contributions and personal sacrifices made by hundreds of surviving widows and widowers across the territory, and the many thousands across Australia. It is held on 19 October to coincide with the birthday of Jessie Vasey, who founded the War Widows Guild of Australia, which is now referred to as the Australian War Widows, with the original group founded in 1945. For 80 years, the organisation has provided vital support, advocacy and connection to war widows across Australia.

The ACT government began formally recognising War Widows Day in 2023. This year, War Widows ACT hosted a commemorative luncheon on 19 October at the Ainslie Football Club, supported by the ACT government, Canberra Legacy and Canberra Services Club. The event brought together key veteran and widow support groups. I acknowledge the dedicated work of War Widows ACT, which continues to support over 700 war widows in our local community.

Recognition of War Widows Day is part of a proud tradition in the ACT of honouring the families of those who have made the ultimate sacrifice. We are privileged to join other states in marking this day and in shining a light on the courage and personal sacrifice of widows across our territory.

Crime—ram raids

MS MORRIS (Brindabella) (4.21): Everyone in Canberra deserves to feel safe in their home, in their business and in their community. The devastating and cowardly attack on a local coffee shop in Casey overnight is yet another reminder that too many Canberrans no longer do. This is not an isolated act. It is part of a panic wave taking over Canberra. Ram raids, assaults, shootings and break-ins are happening across the city and people are fed up.

The ACT government's decades-long campaign to weaken bail, water down police powers and starve frontline officers of the resources they need has consequences, and this is it. The ACT's justice system does little to deter criminal behaviour. We need to restore balance to the justice system. We need to strengthen the bail system, back our police with the tools they need to do their job, and put victims and community safety first.

Canberrans deserve better than endless excuses. It is time for the government to take crime seriously and to make our community safe.

Discussion concluded.

Legislative Assembly**Working with Vulnerable People scheme—registration fee—standing order 118AA**

MR SPEAKER: Mr Cocks raised some 118AA matters regarding question time. There were four of them. The first of them referred to a question from Dr Paterson, which was, “When were you first made aware of the proposal to charge volunteers \$11 for their working with vulnerable people card?” Dr Paterson’s response was, “I was made aware through the budget process.” We were very close to upholding that one, but we feel that Dr Paterson has answered about a process which all members in this place should be aware of. I understand that it is a long process, but Dr Paterson has skated through on that one, so that one has not been upheld.

Elective surgery—waiting times—standing order 118AA

MR SPEAKER: Mr Cocks also raised a point of order on behalf of Ms Carrick, interestingly, with the question being, “How many surgeons currently employed by CHS are refusing to use pooled waiting lists?” Our view is that the minister, in answering the question, rejected the premise of the question because she stated on a number of occasions that she would not characterise it in that way, and went on to detail the collaborative conversation that is underway about moving to a different way of operating. I am not upholding that one.

ACT public service—work health and safety—standing order 118AA

MR SPEAKER: The third one related to Mr Cocks asking Mr Pettersson about what actions he had taken as the minister responsible for safety in the workplace to prevent bullying and harassment. Mr Pettersson’s answer was originally about WorkSafe ACT and the fact that he does not issue operational directions to WorkSafe. Upon clarification, on a point of order on relevance, Mr Cocks basically said the question was not limited to WorkSafe and Mr Pettersson then referred the member to the Minister for the Public Service with regard to that particular question. I am satisfied that that is responsive to the question.

The final one related to Ms Morris asking, “On how many occasions, Mr Pettersson, have you met with the Minister for the Public Service to discuss the drastic increase in bullying and harassment?” Mr Pettersson said, “I would like to thank the member for the question,” as is Mr Pettersson’s way. He said, “I have frequent meetings with all of my colleagues, and we canvass an array of issues, portfolio matters being central to that.”

The Clerk and I formed a view that that answer was not responsive to the question. I have had a conversation in passing with Mr Pettersson. Under standing order 118AA, the ruling is that he should provide a written response to that question prior to question time tomorrow.

Adjournment

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

That the Assembly do now adjourn.

Early childhood educators

MISS NUTTALL (Brindabella) (4.25): I would like to speak today to congratulate the University of Canberra on being part of an exciting new project. It is one of the 11 universities that are working to develop a teaching performance assessment to enhance the quality of early childhood teacher graduates. It is the hope of the academic leading this project and myself that this will be a step towards equity between early childhood educators and their primary and secondary peers.

It is essential that we ensure that early childhood educators graduate with a degree that presents them with high standards. This project will ensure that the University of Canberra produces graduates that are completely prepared for the challenges of early childhood education and care. Importantly, it puts the University of Canberra in line with the other 10 universities that are trialling these standards.

Among many of the challenges that the early childhood education and care sector is dealing with right now, dodgy-degree mills are an under-discussed one. With the desperation of the sector to get people in, some of the most vulnerable members in our community are, essentially, being fleeced. People who are concerned about their visa situation, young people straight out of school, people trying to move into early childhood education and care from a job that does not pay them well are some of the most common victims. They walk out of some of these institutions with exactly as many legal qualifications as when they walked in. They are treated as nothing more than an income stream.

There are multiple channels we need to explore to deal with these providers. The work that the University of Canberra is doing, alongside the Australian Council of Deans of Education and the Australian Early Childhood Teacher Education Network, is an important piece of the puzzle. If we set the bar high for educators and require institutions to give them a set standard of education, we can improve the entire sector. A base level of skill and qualification, one with serious academic backing, can make a big difference. So, again, congratulations to all the organisations that are helping roll this out and thank you for your tireless work.

Youth—Raise Our Voice in Parliament campaign

MR CAIN (Ginninderra) (4.27): I rise today to participate, as many of our colleagues already have, in Youth Voice in Parliament Week, a powerful initiative led by Raise Our Voice Australia, which gives young Australians the opportunity to have their voices heard in this Assembly. The campaign invites members to amplify the words of young people from their electorates, ensuring their ideas and aspirations help shape the future of our communities. It will be my privilege to read a speech on behalf of Zainab, a young person from my electorate who has shared his vision for the future of the ACT and our nation. Here is Zainab's speech:

Hi, my name is Zainab. I am 11 years old and I am going to be talking about homelessness and how we can change it. Being a homeless person is hard because they have to face a lot of problems such as no safety, no clean water to drink, barely survival in the harsh weather of summer and winter. They also have to use public

bathrooms and they get no showers, which means they can get sick easily. For that, they need a doctor. That is another problem to face.

These are basic needs and without them, life is hard. So here is the solution to stop homelessness. The government should ask people to go to school and make sure everybody gets education. The government makes more schools and gives more citizens education. More people can get degrees to be a doctor, engineer, teacher or another profession.

The government should also encourage people that do not have a degree to do labour work and not be homeless. Like this, there will be more people that have jobs who earn enough money so they can buy a house or even rent one. Because of this, there will be more people living in houses and less people living on the roads. And just remember, no education means no food, no home and no safety.

That is the complete speech of Zainab, 11 years old.

Dental costs

MR RATTENBURY (Kurrajong) (4.29): Recently I was dismayed to learn that last year Australians collectively drew down \$817.6 million from their superannuation to pay for dental treatment. That figure is up nearly \$300 million from the previous year and represents treatment for 34,050 people.

It is true that there are strict guidelines around early drawdown of super in this way. It cannot be used for cosmetic dental procedures—only for treatment where there is a risk of life-threatening illness or injury, acute or chronic pain. Dentists themselves are prohibited from giving financial guidance on the implications of using super in this way, and dentists are also prohibited from advertising it as a potential method of payment, although they are permitted to mention it.

But it strikes me that we are looking at the thin end of a very nasty wedge here. This was never the intent behind Australia's highly successful superannuation scheme. What is next under the compassionate release for super? Are we talking about having to draw it down to pay for Christmas presents for the kids or to pay for a car or a holiday or perhaps more seriously, and undoubtedly worse, to pay for heart surgery or cancer treatment or a new wheelchair?

What does it say about us as a society, and about our increasing levels of wealth inequality, that we are treating this as a reasonable thing to do, to the point where the Australian Dental Association is putting out a media release filled with responsible-sounding pronouncements about this being an important part of our health and safety net? To be clear: I am not intending to criticise the Australian Dental Association here. I am sure they are acting responsibly. Yet they are doing so within a system that is veering increasingly off the rails. I am betting people with more than \$3 million in super are not the ones drawing it down early to pay for their teeth. If the treatment really is for life-threatening illness or injury, acute or chronic pain, why is this not being covered by Medicare?

Of course, members will perhaps know that it is actually Greens policy at a national level to put dental into Medicare, because we know that people are putting off going to

the dentist because they cannot afford it. Not getting to the dentist does not just mean worse teeth but also a range of other health issues too. Whether it is to improve dental health, general health or mental health, as a society it really is worth working harder to ensure that people can get access to the dental care they need without having to raid their retirement savings.

We only have to look at daily headlines from the USA to see the consequence of an ever-widening wealth gap and a social safety net with more holes than a moth-riddled blanket. Australia's political and civic leaders need to heed the cautionary tale we are seeing in this country as well and change course. The compassionate release of super, while well-intentioned, is not a solution. It is a stopgap, a band-aid, and yet another can kicked down the road.

The answer to many people who cannot afford life-saving dental treatment is not to give them access to their savings that they will need in retirement to keep a roof over their heads. It is, in fact, about having the courage as political leaders to address the growing gaps in this country, to raise the revenue from those who can afford it and to make sure we have the resources to provide the basic health services for those that need them.\

Education—artificial intelligence

MR EMERSON (Kurrajong) (4.33): This speech was prepared by Medina Tabbouche, whom I was lucky to have join my team last week for her work experience placement. In this speech, she reflects on her experiences and views on the use of artificial intelligence by school students and the impact it is having across our society. She wrote:

Recently, the rise of artificial intelligence has changed how students go about their learning at school. Students are now using AI as a replacement for research, using it to write their assignments and do their work. By doing this, students are destroying the critical thinking skills needed to produce work that is authentic and reliable. Because of this, students are not understanding the work that is being given to them, but instead relying on a robot to understand it for them, never actually attempting to understand what they are meant to do.

The dependence on AI is getting out of hand, as students become extremely reliant on it, that they cannot even bother to research or find ideas themselves. The use of AI to find websites for assignments is not necessarily bad, but when it is used to write whole assignments it becomes more than just using a little bit of help and instead becomes a resource for students to avoid doing work on their own. This issue is now affecting and damaging the youth's critical thinking skills and becoming a big problem as students' dependence on AI advances. Students are no longer taking the time to think about solutions and answers, but now ask AI for advice on what to do.

I would like to thank Medina for her insights in this speech, which was not written by ChatGPT. It certainly puts us all on notice in this place to make sure we remain cognisant of the rapidly evolving state of AI. We have a responsibility, especially to younger generations, to ensure we do not overlook the significance of the impacts it is already having and will continue to grow to have on our community and our society more broadly. Again, it was fantastic to have Medina in the office last week.

Racism

MR BRADDOCK (Yerrabi) (4.35): I wish I did not have to deliver this speech, and I am going to put a content warning on the front. This speech reflects on white supremacy and racism and may be confronting for some people. To those who may be watching live or on playback, there is no shame if you want to step away from this topic. Each person has their own capacity to engage with this difficult topic. But if you have the capacity to hear some truth, please stick around.

A flyer was distributed earlier this month in Phillip and Mawson. It espoused white supremacist and neo-Nazi ideology from a group calling itself, quite literally, White Australia. If you were to visit the website link shown on the flyer, you would find the organisation is led by known neo-Nazi Thomas Sewell and includes the neo-Nazi slogan “blood and honour”. The website hosts a pseudo-documentary produced to publicise their organisation. In it, Thomas Sewell describes a deliberate decision to tire everyone out with a long run before holding a mixed martial arts tournament so that people can practise fighting whilst tired. This gives an indication on what the intent is—basically, violence.

The pseudo-documentary proceeds to depict a rally held in South Australia, with the express intent of linking their racist movement with the spirit of the ANZACS, singing *Waltzing Matilda*. It is then followed by a conference of his so-called White Australia organisation, which includes a banner with the same imagery depicted in the neo-Nazi flyer distributed in Florey back in March. It is all white men, all glorified, self-described as militant, proudly neo-Nazi and trying to recruit members and supporters.

Thomas Sewell of White Australia is trying to register a political party. To say I am disturbed would be a significant understatement. This is a threat to all of us, and I do not mean that in simply in a political sense. We also know that this kind of authoritarianism cannot be beaten by a similarly aggressive response. Police confrontation emboldens them and feeds them. Simply arresting them makes them feel their aggression is warranted and that their cause is just. They are wrong, but that is not how the alt-right sees things.

The way we beat this is by doubling down on democratic principles. As we improve people’s lives and spread kindness—as we are actively anti-racist—we challenge the very seeds of hatred manifesting as white nationalism. We know the world can be a better place. The world does not need hatred, violence or racial supremacy. The people of Mawson and Phillip do not deserve this type of propaganda in their letterboxes. I want you to know that Canberra cares.

Brindabella electorate—engagement

MS TOUGH (Brindabella) (4.38): It will never cease to surprise me how much a life can change in a year. A year ago, I had a successful and rewarding career in the public service while balancing the profound responsibility of motherhood. Today, I am balancing the needs of my own family with that of the interests and concerns of over 80,000 constituents across Brindabella. Twelve months in, I am confident in the progress I have achieved and the meaningful change I have helped to bring about. From addressing local community issues as they emerge to advancing the broader long-term

priorities, no two days are ever the same.

This first year has been a journey of finding the balance between learning and putting those lessons into action, ensuring that every insight gained translates into tangible benefits for the community. I am incredibly proud of the first motion I moved in this chamber last year about Genius childcare centres. At the time, it seemed like there was just one centre in Gowrie not paying the staff. Quickly, I realised there were five centres in the ACT not paying staff and then multiple centres across the country not paying staff. I thank all the educators and the families from across the country that reached out—from Queensland to WA, Victoria and across Canberra—to tell me what was actually happening and just how big the problem was.

Standing up for the rights of workers to be paid properly and on time is something I will always do, and standing up for the families who trust these centres is something I will always do as well. While some of these centres ultimately closed, some have new owners and some, many, many, many months on, are still stuck in a kind of limbo. Genius is no longer operating and regulators across the country are aware of the behaviour and looking into it. Even this week, I introduced a motion to expand workers' compensation to the gig economy, those who we rely upon every day but who do not receive the protections and entitlements of other occupations. So I think I have shown I will always stand up for workers and represent them here in this place.

Earlier this year, I worked to prevent the closure of the Point Hut dog exercise area in Gordon when the new Lanyon dog park opened. At Point Hut, I saw the enduring value of our community spaces, both formal and informal alike, that serve our community. I saw how powerful collective community voices can be in both driving change and protecting the people and places they care about. But, most importantly, I then showed that addressing the concerns of the community is central to everything I do, with each issue raised receiving my full attention and commitment to achieving a resolution.

I called on the government to act on reflecting our inclusive National Food Curriculum in ACT schools to account for the changing and different needs of all households around food, from medical conditions and cultural practices to those who suffer from disordered eating. Additionally, I called for providing outside of school hours care to preschool students to make it easier for families.

Those in the chamber today are no stranger to my advocacy for women's health, having listened to me speak at length about these issue. Even today, as I mark the third week of Frocktober, where I have been wearing a different dress every day of the month to spark a conversation around ovarian cancer and help drive funding for research into early detection, women's health is never far from my priorities.

This year has been hard work—there is no denying that—but, with it has brought both lows and highs for me, my office, my family and the supporters who help me get where I am. We have all experienced this together. This job is a unique one and it brings with it adventure in many forms, both spontaneous and eagerly underlined in the diary. I found myself inspecting playgrounds and dog parks and, unfortunately, both a staff member and I at different times have done this unplanned in high heels when the need arose. But the true privilege of this role is found in the smile I cannot shake after receiving those special heartfelt messages from the community, the simple works of

thanks and encouragement when I have helped someone and changed their lives.

As I enter my second year on the job, I do not plan on slowing down. There is much to look forward to in Tuggeranong and in Canberra. I will continue to keep Richardson shops and infrastructure and transport in Tuggeranong on the agenda. I will continue to represent families and I will continue advocating for women's health. This job is a special one and not one to take for granted, as I am sure everyone in this chamber agrees.

Thank you to all my staff across this year: Katelyn Alex, Sophia, Lauren, Cam, Jade and Bec. While some have been with me a long time and others only filled in for a short time between staff, you have all been truly valuable. Thank you for sharing the journey with me. Thank you to my fellow MLAs across the chamber who welcomed me and shared insights. Thank you to my friends who provide advice and, importantly, listen to my rants and venting. Most importantly, thank you to my family for always being there. It has been an incredible year.

MR SPEAKER: It is not technically part of the adjournment debate, but I want to mention, as the Speaker, that I have received advice regarding a point of order raised by Mr Petterson in a debate earlier today, which the Clerk and I will be reviewing and we will have a ruling on that in the morning.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

The Assembly adjourned at 4.43 pm.