



DEBATES
OF THE
LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
FOR THE
AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

DAILY HANSARD

Edited proof transcript

5 February 2026

This is an **EDITED PROOF TRANSCRIPT** of proceedings that is subject to further checking. Members' suggested corrections for the official *Weekly Hansard* should be lodged in writing with the Hansard office no later than **Tuesday, 24 February 2026**.

Thursday, 5 February 2026

Petitions:

National Capital Plan—draft amendment 102—petitions 5-25 and 11-26	241
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people—access to health care— petition 65-25.....	241
Planning—Waters Edge, Greenway—petition 10-26	242
Motion to take note of petitions.....	243
National Capital Plan—draft amendment 102—petitions 5-25 and 11-26	244
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people—access to health care— petition 65-25.....	246
National Capital Plan—draft amendment 102—petitions 5-25 and 11-26	246
Planning—Waters Edge, Greenway—petition 10-26	247
National Capital Plan—Draft Amendment 102—petitions 5-25 and 11-26 ..	248
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people—access to health care— petition 65-25.....	248
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs; Climate Change, Environment, Energy and Water; Disability, Carers and Community Services; and Seniors and Veterans portfolios—government priorities (Ministerial statement).....	250
Business, Arts and Creative Industries, Children, Youth and Families, Multicultural Affairs and Skills, Training and Industrial Relations portfolios— government priorities (Ministerial statement).....	262
Police, Fire and Emergency Services, Women, Prevention of Family and Domestic Violence, Corrections and Gaming Reform portfolios— government priorities (Ministerial statement).....	268
Children and young people—Children’s Education and Care Assurance (Ministerial statement)	273
Children and young people—safety in early childhood education and care (Ministerial statement)	279
Crime—attacks on women—update (Ministerial statement)	280
Public Accounts and Administration—Standing Committee	287
Economics, Industry and Recreation—Standing Committee	288
Environment and Planning—Standing Committee.....	288
Legal Affairs—Standing Committee	290
Standing orders—suspension.....	291
ACT Ambulance Service—staffing.....	291
Amendment to Assembly resolution.....	291
Questions without notice:	
Budget—deficit	292
Budget—priorities	293
Schools—senior secondary language courses	294
Schools—senior secondary language courses	295
Justice—anti-vilification laws	296
Schools—literacy and numeracy	297
Budget—election commitments	298
Budget—deficit	299
North Canberra Hospital—freestanding birth centre.....	300
Budget—public service pay.....	302
Budget—critical services.....	303
Health—public hospitals	304

Canberra Health Services—staff	305
Parking—disability parking.....	306
National Multicultural Festival 2026.....	308
Parking—long stay parking	309
Planning—Waters Edge, Greenway	310
Supplementary answers to questions without notice:	
Public schools—access to generative AI.....	311
Schools—literacy and numeracy programs	311
Papers	312
Territory Records (Executive Records) Amendment Bill 2025	315
Housing—supply	321
Motion to take note of papers	334
Justice and Community Safety Legislation Amendment Bill 2025 (No 3)	334
Racism—condemnation of the March for Australia rally.....	341
Statements by members:	
Tourism—Garema Place Hotel	359
Disability—home accessibility accommodations.....	359
Arts—Shakespeare by the Lakes	360
Mr Michael Harris, ACT Auditor-General—resignation	360
Adjournment:	
Mr Michael Harris, ACT Auditor-General—resignation	361
Tertiary education—costs.....	361
Planning and development—Hawker—disused tennis courts site	362
Rent Relief Fund.....	364
Geoff Buchanan, CARE Financial Counselling—resignation	365
International events—Venezuela.....	365
Mr Michael Harris, ACT Auditor-General—resignation	366
Mr Michael Harris, ACT Auditor-General—resignation	366
Geoff Buchanan, CARE Financial Counselling—resignation	366
Schedule of amendments:	
Schedule 1: Territory Records (Executive Records) Amendment Bill 2025.....	369

Thursday, 5 February 2026

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

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

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

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

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

Petitions

The following petitions were lodged for presentation:

National Capital Plan—draft amendment 102—petitions 5-25 and 11-26

By Mr Emerson, from 585 and 37 residents respectively:

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

The following residents of the Australian Capital Territory draw the attention of the Assembly to Draft Amendment 102 to the National Capital Plan, which proposes significant increases to building height and density within the Hume Circle Precinct, including land on which established low-rise residential complexes are currently located (such as Staffordshire Terrace, Griffith). Residents are concerned about the timing and adequacy of the consultation process, the lack of direct notification to affected owner-occupiers, and the potential loss of established medium-density housing, green space, amenity, and community cohesion. Residents note that this area already provides housing diversity within the inner south and that the proposed changes would permanently alter the character and liveability of the precinct.

Your petitioners, therefore, request the Assembly to call on the ACT Government to seek an extension of the consultation period for Draft Amendment 102, and call on the Commonwealth Minister to amend the proposal by excluding established low-rise residential complexes and their immediate surrounds.

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

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people—access to health care—

petition 65-25

By Mr Rattenbury, from 544 residents:

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

The following residents of the ACT draw the attention of the Assembly that: the Australian Capital Territory (ACT) is failing its Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander residents with lack of investment in access to health care services.

The ACT consistently records some of the lowest rates of access to health services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People in Australia:

- Access to the General Aboriginal Annual Health Assessment (MBS 715) in the ACT is consistently lower than any other jurisdiction in Australia except Victoria. In 2024/25 access rate was under 17%, compared with 26% national (DSS Medicare data).
- Most Aboriginal people in the ACT didn't access a single general health check in 5 years (AIHW, Health checks and follow-ups for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, 2025).
- Rates are particularly low for children and young people (approximately 10% for ages 0-24), (analysis of Medical Cost Finder data, 2025).
- In addition to persistently low rates of access to health checks in General Practice, the ACT has some of the highest costs of private specialist care in Australia (analysis of Medical Cost Finder data, 2025). The ACT is currently not on track to deliver on its commitment that: "Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have equity in health and wellbeing outcomes as any other members of the community" (ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Agreement 2019-2028).

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

- Allocate appropriate funding for the right services when needed: we request that the Territory support existing Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Services directly to ensure that appropriate access to primary health care for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People in the ACT is strengthened to address the current urgent need and for long-term sustainability and growth to meet growing population needs.
- Ensures that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People in the ACT have appropriate pathways to specialist care required to ensure equity in health and wellbeing outcomes
- Ensure that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who live in the North of Canberra or who would like to access Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Services in the North of Canberra can do so locally.

Pursuant to standing order 99A, the petition, having at least 500 signatories, was referred to the Standing Committee on Social Policy.

Planning—Waters Edge, Greenway—petition 10-26

By **Miss Nuttall**, from 95 residents:

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

This petition of certain residents of the Australian Capital Territory draws to the attention of the Assembly that the Waters Edge complex, 10 Ellison Harvie Close, Greenway, requires a solution to the re-siting of the pathway on the lake side of Waters Edge.

The pathway is deemed to be part of the ACT Active Travel Plan which is designed to facilitate walking, rolling, riding and other forms of active travel. The pathway is proposed to be 1m away from the property boundary of Waters Edge residences. From a safety perspective, individuals with mobility, sight or hearing impairments, young children including babies being pushed in prams are at risk due to the close proximity of the proposed pathway to the residential boundary.

To some residence the proposed placement represents 5m from their bedroom or lounge room offering no privacy or peaceful amenity to their daily lives. Constructive consultation between residents and the ACT Government could improve safety outcomes for both residents and pathway users. Furthermore, it will help to preserve residents' privacy and contribute positively to the amenity and overall wellbeing of residents.

If the residents' legitimate safety concerns continue to be ignored and an incident occurs resulting from this omission, this would inevitably expose the ACT Government to an increased risk of liability and litigation. A consultative and cooperative approach would mitigate this risk by giving legitimate voice to the unresolved resident egress safety issues associated with this development.

Your petitioners therefore request the Assembly to call on the Territory Planning Authority, ACT Government, to

1. engage appropriately and constructively with residents of *Waters Edge* complex.
2. amend the DA to accurately state that the walls of the dwellings on the eastern side of Lake Tuggeranong, specifically in the Waters Edge complex, are as low as 0.75 m high rather than the currently claimed height of 1.8 m, and
3. base evaluation of the DA on Safety and privacy to residents through accurate information. Commit to meaningful community consultation on the siting of the pathway.

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

Motion to take note of petitions

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

That the petitions so lodged be noted.

National Capital Plan—draft amendment 102—petitions 5-25 and 11-26

MR EMERSON (Kurrajong) (10.02): I rise to speak on the petition relating to draft amendment 102 to the National Capital Plan. I want to thank community members for bringing this forward, asking for a response to their petition and joining us in the gallery here today.

Including the paper petition, over 620 signatures were attracted within a single week, which is a testament not only to the level of community concern about the issue, but also to the level of engagement by residents with what is happening in their community and their efforts—which government sometimes fail to do themselves—to engage with each other and with elected representatives to ensure their voices have been heard.

The petition calls for the Assembly to push the commonwealth government to exclude established low-rise residential complexes from draft amendment 102. Those complexes include Staffordshire Terrace in Griffith, which is where residents here live. The draft amendment proposes the creation of a new designated area encompassing the Hume Circle surrounds to give the National Capital Authority detailed planning control over the future development of the area.

While responsibility for this process lies with the NCA, I note that the draft amendment was prepared in conjunction with the ACT government. Currently, the land in question is subject to use under the Territory Plan. Importantly, the people who are directly affected by these changes are our community members—our constituents.

Over the last two weeks, I have been contacted by many of these people—residents who feel blindsided, forgotten and frightened about what the future holds for them, now that this has been announced. I understand that they have contacted other representatives as well. I see this as a failure on behalf of the government to consult or engage directly with affected residents before announcing these proposed changes. It has caused a huge amount of stress, which is absolutely understandable.

There are mechanisms that make it very easy for governments to engage with residents, particularly when so many of them live in the same place. As I said, these residents in particular have been very proactive in engaging with us. It would be good to see more of that happening in the opposite direction. The owners corporation, of course, is one example of an appropriate place to engage directly.

I suppose, in some senses, the material of this draft amendment, or the material of any government proposal, is only part of the issue. The issue here is the lack of consideration for the immense anxiety and stress caused to residents out of the blue when they find out about these kinds of proposals which have the potential to significantly impact their lives and their futures through indirect channels.

There are, of course, many reasons that this causes stress for residents. Not having adequate information about changes that have the potential to impact the security of your home would cause stress for anyone, even if those changes will be made at some point in the future about which we are still unclear.

But these changes are not all in the distant future. If the Hume Circle precinct draft amendment is passed as it stands, the rezoning of certain areas may mean rates increase hugely, leaving residents in financial difficulty. While there might not be plans compulsorily to acquire their homes, that financial difficulty may make that decision feel like it is not one for them to make—one that is taken out of their hands.

There are other issues with this process: the loss, or prospective loss, of the exact kind of housing that we constantly hear in this place that we need in the ACT, which is what is currently in place at Staffordshire Terrace, considerations about the impact on the schools nearby, and more. But the biggest issue that I see, as it is, is how we treat the people that we are elected to represent.

Again, I acknowledge, of course, that the NCA has now met with residents and spoken with them. I understand that not many questions have been answered as yet, but this should have happened far sooner.

If we are to see good development happen in the ACT—and, of course, we know development is happening—we need to ensure that it is built on the strong foundations of the existing communities that we have here, and good design that we are so lucky to have in the territory.

Residents have made it clear that they have no intention of moving, so rezoning the land on which they currently live is not of benefit to them. It is also unclear whether this has ever been done by the NCA for existing residential tenants. They asked those questions as well and seem not to have received an answer.

I hope that this petition is taken seriously by all members, particularly members for the electorate of Kurrajong, some of whom I am sure will speak after me. Again, I thank the residents for bringing it to our attention and for taking the time this morning to come in here and ensure that their voices are heard.

MS LEE (Kurrajong) (10.08): I thank my fellow member for Kurrajong, Mr Emerson, for bringing this petition to the chamber. I also acknowledge the local residents for their advocacy and for taking the time to be here this morning.

Like many of the other members for Kurrajong, I am sure, my office has also received a number of contacts from concerned residents in relation to this draft amendment 102 to the National Capital Plan, insofar as it relates to the Hume Circle precinct. The fact that the petition got quite a lot of traction, as Mr Emerson mentioned—hundreds of signatures within a week—just goes to show how much of a concern it is for local residents.

This consultation is currently underway, and it will close on 17 February; which, of course, was extended. I have also been contacted directly by a number of residents about the concern as it relates not only to the proposal, but also the consultation process. As Mr Emerson has already mentioned, despite the fact that this is an NCA amendment, the fact is that it does impact people who are our community members—those who contribute to Canberra, those who call Canberra home and, specifically, my electorate of Kurrajong.

Many told me that they found out about the proposal only a few weeks ago and that they feel they have not been given adequate time to make a substantial contribution to the consultation process. They raised concerns that they were not contacted directly, as the people who will be impacted the most by these proposed changes. I find it extraordinary and, quite frankly, downright wrong that they were not.

Some of the other concerns that were raised include proposed changes to building heights, the impact of increased traffic and the pressure this will put on existing parking facilities, the loss of mature trees and the loss of green spaces. These are legitimate concerns by Canberrans who deserve to have their concerns heard. These are their homes, these are their neighbourhoods, and this is where their families are.

My office is in the process of engaging with the federal minister for territories to make sure that the concerns of my constituents are taken seriously and that we all work together to ensure that their concerns are included in relation to any ongoing further consultation.

Once again, I thank the members of the community who have raised their concerns, have been very active in their advocacy and have made sure that these genuine concerns are also raised in this forum, in the Assembly.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people—access to health care—petition 65-25
National Capital Plan—draft amendment 102—petitions 5-25 and 11-26

MR RATTENBURY (Kurrajong) (10.10): I rise today to speak to the petition calling on the ACT government to provide greater support for access to health services for Aboriginal people in the north of Canberra. I would like to acknowledge Selina Walker, Uncle Fred and team members from Yerrabi Yurwang, who have been the instigators of this petition, and they join us in the gallery today.

The petition calls on the ACT government to strengthen support for Aboriginal community-controlled health services, improve pathways to specialist care, and ensure that Aboriginal people in the north of Canberra can access services locally. These are reasonable, evidence-based and urgent requests.

We believe that health equity is not optional. It is a core responsibility of government. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have the right to the same health outcomes as everyone else, and achieving this requires targeted investment and genuine partnership with Aboriginal organisations. At its heart, this petition is about fairness. It is about whether Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in our community can access high-quality, culturally safe health care without barriers, long waits or prohibitive costs.

The evidence shows that the ACT has work to do. Fewer than 17 per cent of Aboriginal people accessed an Aboriginal annual health assessment in 2024-25, compared with 26 per cent nationally. Most Aboriginal people in the ACT did not access a single general health check over a five-year period, and access rates are particularly low for children and young people. These figures point to real barriers to care—distance, lack of culturally safe services and insufficient community-controlled health provision. These

gaps are not abstract. They translate into poorer health outcomes, missed opportunities for early intervention and preventable harm.

The urgency of this challenge is also reflected in new data from the Australian Early Development Census. In 2024, the survey included 192 Aboriginal children in the ACT and revealed worsening outcomes across all five developmental domains. One-third of Aboriginal children are now vulnerable in physical health and more than one-quarter are vulnerable in emotional maturity. Vulnerability has also increased in social competence, language and cognitive skills, and communication skills. Only 24 per cent of Aboriginal children in the ACT are developmentally on track across all five domains, down from 41 per cent in 2009, and more than half are vulnerable in at least one domain.

It is interesting to look at emergency department data as well. The ACT recorded 7,680 ED presentations for Indigenous patients in 2024-25. This represents a ratio 2.1 times higher compared to non-Indigenous ACT residents, whereas nationally the rate is 2.7 times higher, and we also see that they are not being seen in as timely a manner as their non-Indigenous compatriots. In 2024-25, only 60 per cent of emergency presentations for Indigenous patients in the ACT were seen on time, compared with 67 per cent nationally, and a figure of 62 per cent for non-Indigenous patients in the ACT. Median wait times at the emergency department for Indigenous patients in the ACT was 27 minutes in 2024-25, which is worse than the national rate for Indigenous patients, at 19 minutes, and for the rate of non-Indigenous patients in the ACT, at 25 minutes.

This is a lot of data, but it points to trends that are a warning sign. They tell us that too many Aboriginal children are not receiving the support they need early in life. They tell us that too many Aboriginal people are not accessing the health care they need. I think that the emergency department data particularly points to the need for greater investment in preventive care so that people are not ending up in hospital.

I am pleased to have sponsored this petition. I thank the petitioners for bringing it forward, and I implore the government to work closely with the Aboriginal community in the ACT to improve this situation.

I want to use the short bit of remaining time to acknowledge the petition brought by Mr Emerson relating to draft amendment 102. I want to acknowledge the petitioners from Staffordshire Terrace in Griffith, particularly Kimberley, who, I believe, is the instigator, and who I had a good conversation with on the phone last week. I have received quite a few emails about this, and it is clearly a very supportive community in Staffordshire Terrace.

I was particularly disappointed to see the NCA run a consultation period over the summer holidays, when people are trying to either have a break, go away or possibly are not paying attention. I am pleased that that has been corrected. There are still a lot of issues to look at with this one. Mr Emerson and Ms Lee have made a good summary of that. I welcome the petitioners to the Assembly today and I thank them for contacting me as well.

Planning—Waters Edge, Greenway—petition 10-26

MISS NUTTALL (Brindabella) (10.16): I rise to speak to the petition I have the

privilege of sponsoring today on behalf of Waters Edge residents and their friends and community. We have talked a lot about consultation this week. I am sure every member of this chamber would readily put their hand on their heart and say that consultation matters. It is part of everything we do. Consultation is not just an ideal, though; it is a practice. Right now, I have risen on behalf of residents who have demonstrated that they are more than willing to engage with government. This is a matter of their home.

Waters Edge residents first became aware of a proposed park on the lakeside of their homes when a DA was originally lodged in August 2024. Before then, and to this point, they have had an unsealed gravel path at the back of their residences, at times less than a metre away from their back gates. There have been two major challenges through this DA process. The first has been the proposed placement of the new permanent path, right on top of that unsealed gravel path, and the second has been the lack of consultation with residents throughout.

The placement of the current gravel path is a problem. It is too close to people's gates. Waters Edge residents have sent me photos. There are photos of people standing on their steps with a pram just about jutting out into a blind crossroad, dogs on leads scampering out, and crushed garden border plants from the trucks that come through, often at speed. You can understand why residents are finding the current path quite dangerous.

Residents have been super clear with me that they want a sealed path. In fact, they have been asking the government for a few years. But signage for the path DA was not great. Signs were put in areas where residents were unlikely to frequent. Residents wrote to the minister for planning and then were referred to the minister responsible for the Suburban Land Agency. I do not believe they have received a response. They finally managed to get in touch with the proponents of the path, but they were only offered an online meeting the very next day for half an hour during work hours. I do not know how many of us in this building could do that timing on short notice.

Now the DA has been conditionally approved, but residents have not been brought on board. They just want the people designing the path that impacts their everyday lives to listen and work with them to find a path that will be safe, accessible and fair. Now that the government is moving on to detailed design work on the path, this is a really important opportunity to actually engage one of the core user groups for this path. That is what the petition calls on this government to do: engage appropriately and constructively with residents of the Waters Edge complex and commit to meaningful community consultation on the siting of the pathway.

I seriously encourage the minister to reach out to Waters Edge residents. I certainly far better understood their concerns when they kindly invited me to their homes to take a look. They are a group that has been willing to work very constructively. All they want is a fair, safe outcome for their gorgeous little part of Tuggeranong, and as an Assembly we should back them on that.

**National Capital Plan—Draft Amendment 102—petitions 5-25 and 11-26
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people—access to health care—
petition 65-25**

MS STEPHEN-SMITH (Kurrajong—Minister for Health, Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Finance and Minister for the Public Service) (10.19): I rise to speak on two of the petitions that were tabled today. First, I want to recognise the residents of Narrabundah, the surrounding Hume Circle and particularly Staffordshire Terrace who are here in the chamber today, and the many residents who have written to me as the local member for Kurrajong, expressing their concern about the National Capital Authority's Hume Circle Precinct Draft Amendment 102. As I have responded to a number of residents, I have indicated that I very much appreciate their concerns about the proposal itself and particularly the short consultation timeframe and the timing of the consultation by the National Capital Authority.

As I have done in response to the pieces of correspondence, I start by reassuring residents that the National Capital Authority's intention has been to establish a medium-to long-term zoning change and not to force the sale or redevelopment of Staffordshire Terrace or any existing homes. I emphasise that the relevant legislation puts any decision to redevelop a unit title development in the hands of the unit owners. This should have been, and should continue to be, clearly communicated throughout the consultation process.

Nevertheless, I understand, and it has been clear from correspondents, that the proposal has created considerable uncertainty and distress for owners and residents in Staffordshire Terrace. In my initial responses, I agreed that extended consultation would be appropriate. Indeed, the Chief Minister and the Minister for Planning and Sustainable Development wrote to the National Capital Authority last week, advocating for an extension to the consultation period, and I was pleased to see that occurred.

I certainly was concerned to hear from local residents that it did not appear that the National Capital Authority had sought to directly engage either Staffordshire Terrace residents or the body corporate. I am pleased to hear that a meeting has now taken place. I indicated to residents that I was happy to sponsor the petition, but Mr Emerson got in first, so congratulations to Mr Emerson. But local members for Kurrajong are on a unity ticket on this one, in being concerned about the impact on residents and about the proposal more broadly and its potential impact.

I note that this is the first consultation on a high level on changes to the National Capital Plan. There would, by the nature of these things, be further consultation by the NCA on any detailed conditions for the site, should an amendment to the National Capital Plan proceed, as well as further consultations for any works approvals that would be required.

I thank residents who brought forward the petition and I thank Mr Emerson for bringing it to the Assembly. I hope that residents take some reassurance from the fact that all members for Kurrajong are united in wanting to support them in their dealings with the National Capital Authority.

I also want to speak briefly on the petition brought by Mr Rattenbury in relation to health care for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in Canberra's north. I recognise Selina, Aunty Mat, Uncle Fred, Aunty Vicki and others who are in the chamber today to bring this petition to the Assembly. From an ACT government perspective, we are certainly considering future investment and spending decisions in

the 2026-27 budget, but we have committed \$1½ million to expand bulk-billing for children and young people under the age of 16. We will advise clinics in North Canberra, including Yerrabi Yurwang, when the expression of interest process for that opens.

I was pleased to meet with board members from Yerrabi Yurwang to discuss their specific situation, and will continue to work with community partners to support culturally-informed service development, including working with the Australian government, which clearly has primary responsibility for both primary care and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community controlled health services support. I again thank Mr Rattenbury and the petitioners for bringing this matter to the attention of the Assembly.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

**Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs; Climate Change, Environment, Energy and Water; Disability, Carers and Community Services; and Seniors and Veterans portfolios—government priorities
Ministerial statement**

MS ORR (Yerrabi—Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, Minister for Climate Change, Environment, Energy and Water, Minister for Disability, Carers and Community Services and Minister for Seniors and Veterans) (10.24): It is fair to say that 2026 is already off to a roaring start and, by all indications, things we never thought possible will become open for genuine consideration. It is not lost on me that, within my portfolio responsibilities, there are some big areas of reform. I look forward to open-minded and genuine consideration by all members of this place of the new and exciting opportunities to respond to these, irrespective of political ideology.

The areas of big reform I talk about are: determining the approach, priorities and actions for our next phase of climate change action to both reduce emissions and adapt to an already-changing climate; reforming our approach to environmental stewardship to best harness the many opportunities stemming from the new federal environment laws, and, most importantly, looking after our precious environment and ecosystems; reforming the way government identifies and prioritises the needs of our community and how, together with the community sector, we will design and deliver programs to respond to these; designing and delivering an ecosystem of supports for children aged 0 to 8 with developmental delay or autism and needing low and moderate supports; and, perhaps in one of the greatest areas of reform before us, closing the gap through genuine partnership.

In outlining my priorities for addressing each of these, I will start with closing the gap. When taking on the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander portfolio at the start of the term, I deliberately took an approach of listening to community before forming any firm views on actions to be taken. What I heard in those first six to 12 months is a community that cares deeply about one another, a community that does not just say they are there for one another but turns up time and time again to give that support every time it is needed, and a community that, no matter the effort they put in, often feels that their

calls are left unanswered and that the changes needed take too long.

I reflected extensively on what I heard from listening to the community in those first months and thought deeply on it as a minister and what we could do to change this as a government. The honest answer is there is no simple answer. It is about how we reconcile, how we find and show respect, how we break down and remove the entrenched discrimination within our institutions, and that, whether consciously or not, within ourselves there are challenges that do not come with a handy step-by-step guide. But what I am resolved to is that the only way we stand a chance is through genuine partnership.

It is from here and in collaboration with the Elected Body that the government stood up the Closing the Gap Subcommittee of cabinet, where ministers, officials and the elected representatives of community all have a seat at the table to come together and work through the challenges before us. It was pointed out to me last year and in the lead-up to our first subcommittee meeting that no jurisdiction had ever created space the way we were about to. I think it is fair to say nobody quite knew how this new approach would go in practice, but following the first meeting it was clear. Realising the potential of the subcommittee as a vehicle to drive the change that has proven so elusive will be one of my key priorities over the coming 12 months.

The subcommittee is tasked with developing a government transformation strategy, an ACCO development strategy, and improving data practices—three things that sound simple but represent the mechanisms for truth-telling, addressing institutional racism, and putting self-determination into practice. These are the core tenets of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap and ones I am honoured to be paving the way on in genuine partnership with community.

Last week, the government opened public consultation on our next climate change strategy. The strategy will look a bit different to past ones as it will take the form of an overarching framework and separate short-term action plans. The approach will ensure government is focused on the right areas of need and responsive to the challenges and opportunities across these as they emerge. Consultation currently underway focuses on the proposed framework and is seeking feedback from the ACT community on the scope of the key themes and the challenges and opportunities individuals experience across these.

Climate change is a challenge which elicits strong views across a range of perspectives. Some will deny it, while others will call it an existential threat. Talking about the climate change challenge in extremes might get attention in the short term, but over a longer period it makes interacting with the problem more difficult. Conversations become fraught and overwhelming, and many people will just disengage. Based on where the ACT finds itself now on its journey to net zero, people disengaging is the last thing we need. There is no doubt that climate change is a serious and extensive challenge that will affect all of us in many ways and in every facet of our day-to-day lives.

In the ACT, we have made significant progress and are continuing to address the challenge, but, if we keep following the pathway I was left with when coming into the portfolio in November 2024, we will not meet our 2045 net zero target. It is that simple.

There is more to do and the status quo will not cut it, and the answer lies in thinking that has not previously been done. By staying focused on the task at hand, thinking creatively and with the clarity of calmness over haste, we can get back on track to reaching our targets, and this will be my focus and approach over the coming year.

The passing of new environmental laws by the federal Labor government at the end of last year presents a turning point for implementing our own reforms here in the ACT. The new federal laws give us a clear understanding of the obligations and opportunities states and territories can align to. The ACT government is now progressing several of our own reforms. We will be looking at securing a new bilateral agreement, scoping the applicability of a bioregional plan for the ACT, and reforming our environmental offsets policy.

In addition, I will soon be launching public consultation on the next ACT Nature Conservation Strategy. The strategy will shape the collaboration between the ACT government, the community and traditional custodians to conserve flora and fauna as our city grows. It will set out a long-term vision emphasising a strategic landscape-level approach, a cross-tenure nature conservation network, a strong monitoring and evaluation framework, and nature-positive outcomes. Work under the strategy is supported by advanced mapping of key ecological values and critical habitat, which will improve conservation outcomes and inform the development of the ACT landscape plan by the ACT Government Landscape Architect, with recruitment for this position currently underway.

While writing a new climate change strategy and reforming the ACT's environment conservation settings might seem like enough, there is more that I will be working on in the Climate Change, Environment, Energy and Water portfolio over the next 12 months. The ACT government will continue to progress our commitment to circular economy principles, transforming how we use, re-use and regenerate resources across the economy.

As I announced last week—and I note there is a slight typo in my statement—the ACT will be expanding the ACT Container Deposit Scheme to include most wine, spirit, juice, water, flavoured milk and cordial containers. This will align with scheme expansions planned in other jurisdictions and will make a tangible difference. To give industry time to adapt to the changes, we will not be looking at rolling the scheme out before the middle of 2027. Work will continue to identify unnecessary or problematic single-use plastics that could be phased out in the future, and the government will consider what levers can be used beyond regulatory action alone to achieve positive circular economy outcomes. Consultation will commence in coming months on future opportunities to phase out more single-use plastics and encourage re-use in the ACT.

The ACT government will consider a proposal for product stewardship legislation for batteries to address the problems caused by the incorrect disposal of batteries, including fires at waste facilities. A model framework for such legislation has been established by the Environment Ministers Meeting and legislation has been developed in New South Wales.

Improving water quality in Lake Tuggeranong continues to be a priority and, through the Healthy Waterways program, we are developing a 10-year plan to support the

reduction in frequency of algal blooms. Community consultation on the plan wrapped up in December and, following review of the feedback provided by the community, a new 10-year plan will be released. To support sustainable use of water and development in the ACT and consistency of water management across the region and Australia, I will continue to lead the ACT government input into national water reforms, including development of the new National Water Agreement, scoping of the Basin Plan and Water Act reviews, and supporting the Snowy Water Inquiry Outcomes Implementation Deed review.

Last year, I announced an ambitious reform agenda for the ACT government's approach to community services. The reforms will address how the ACT government can better identify the needs within the community, prioritise and respond to this need, and commission with the community sector in a more sustainable way. To support the community sector as we work through these reforms, the ACT government provided \$10 million over two years for all CSI contract holders. With the funding boost now rolled out, our focus will shift to progressing the policy reforms, with consultation on a refreshed social compact, an ACT government community needs and prioritisation framework, and a revised commissioning framework to commence shortly.

The current reforms are preceded by significant and sustained advocacy by the community sector to improve the government's approach. It is a complex area of work that involves many of my counterparts who hold service portfolio responsibilities, as well as the diverse sector of service providers, grassroots community groups and other civil society organisations. This work will be supported by a new dedicated team within the ACT public service, expected to be finalised as part of the machinery of government changes. These reforms will mean change, but that is not a bad thing.

This brings me to the last of the key priorities I outlined at the start of this statement. Last Friday, national cabinet reached agreement on the health and disability reforms. This agreement will see much-needed funding for our hospital systems, as outlined by the Minister for Health and others. It will also see the establishment of an ecosystem of supports outside the NDIS, starting with a service system for children aged 0 to 8 years with developmental delay and autism whose needs are met through low to medium supports.

Negotiations are never easy. I want to acknowledge the toll that these negotiations have taken on the community and that at times in the public discourse children with autism have been made to feel like a burden on our community and need "fixing". As I have said before in this place: to any child with autism, neurodiversity or developmental delay, there is nothing wrong with you. You are not a cost or a burden to our community and you do not need fixing.

My great hope is that, as the government and the community work through the design of our ACT ecosystem, we can create a system that genuinely supports children, their carers and their families. But I must also add that an ecosystem of this kind can only truly be supportive if the community it exists within is too. Getting the world to shift is a bigger task and one the government will be progressing through the ACT Disability Inclusion Act and the development of a neurodiversity strategy. I will have more to say on these in coming months.

I present the following paper:

Key priorities for 2026—Ministerial statement, 5 February 2026.

I move:

That the Assembly take note of the paper.

MS CLAY (Ginninderra) (10.36): I thank the minister for her statement of the 2026 priorities for the environment. I would like to speak about the environment, biodiversity and circular economy aspects of that statement. We are in a biodiversity crisis. The trajectory of our environment is going downhill and it will continue that way unless we do something differently. The ACT government has the power and the responsibility to do something. I will quote the Commissioner for Sustainability and the Environment's *Close to the edge* report, and I will keep quoting that report until we have some action that puts us on a different track. That report said:

The current state of our environment is the predictable outcome of ineffective legislation and policy. Maintaining the same approach and rejecting reform is—without doubt—tacit acceptance of and contribution to the biodiversity crisis.

There are a lot of things that we would have liked to see in the minister's priority list for 2026. A biodiversity network, revised offsets policy, and better funding for our local environmental organisations would all have benefited from some tangible actions taking place this year.

In terms of the biodiversity network, community organisations and farmers have been calling on government to implement a biodiversity network for years. Sixty-seven per cent of the ACT's natural temperate grasslands, which are critically endangered, occur outside our reserves, as do 80 per cent of our box gum woodlands. Our planning system does not provide protections for those areas and, without our incredible army of environmental volunteers and farmers who are so passionate about trying to protect our environment, those areas would be at even greater risk.

Because they have no proper protection, they are at the whim of development applications and our weakened environmental offsets policy. Those on public land are sometimes managed as well as possible by rangers, but those rangers do not have enough resources. It is not achieving good environmental outcomes. We need structural reform to our planning and nature laws to properly protect areas outside our reserves, and we need to make sure we are resourcing the people who are looking after those areas so that they can look after our environment properly.

In terms of offsets, former minister for the environment Rebecca Vassarotti initiated a review into our offset policy halfway through last term. That is now a few years ago. That review made a number of recommendations, the vast majority of which have not yet been implemented. The directorate have been working on the new policy for years, but we have consistently heard that the federal nature laws needed to be passed first so that we could see how our ACT policy aligns with that national framework. Those federal laws have now passed. We have an opportunity to lead the nation in how we manage environmental offsets. If we are going to use them, and it seems likely that we are going to continue to do so, we have to find a way to deliver genuinely good

environmental outcomes, not just protect one area to allow destruction in another. We need to make sure that we are getting environmental benefits. If we are just degrading our environment, we are still getting a net loss from nature's perspective.

We are running out of environmental offsets that we can make in the ACT, and I am keen to continue engaging with the minister and her officials around how our environmental mapping work is going. There are a few potential offsets available, but fewer areas can be developed without having a significantly poor environmental consequence. We need to work through it strategically but also quickly, because, if we do not work through it quickly, we are going to continue to see the decline of our environment. I was really pleased to hear the minister mention the need to revise our offsets policy and I am very much hoping that we can get some firm action on that. I personally do not want to accept the status quo, because, as the commissioner has pointed out to us, if we accept the status quo we are simply contributing to the biodiversity crisis.

Our environmental organisations are in a difficult situation at the moment. They run on the smell of an oily rag. They do an incredible job in difficult circumstances and they are mostly operating with volunteer labour and doing work that government cannot and will not afford to do. The commissioner calculated the value of environmental volunteer work is \$21.5 million to the ACT each year. That is an extraordinary contribution to our environment. It is undervalued by our government. We need to make sure that we are supporting and fostering that contribution.

At the moment, our environmental organisations are going through a fairly bureaucratic procurement process. They are bidding for exactly the same small amount of money that they have been working on for years. There was no needs assessment to determine how much money was needed before engaging in a new open tender process. That would have been a really great process. No—the funding was left at the same level and then we asked organisations to spend more of that money in compliance work rather than seeing what they actually needed.

I am disappointed that we have seen in government reports, annual reports and in estimates hearings words like: “Government likes to partner with our environmental organisations.” When we ask what a partnership means, we are told, “They're just a service provider like anybody else.” I do not understand how these things go together. If you are a partner, you are working together and it is a different arrangement. If you are a service provider, we are going to the market system and we are paying properly for the work. I think we do not quite understand how we are engaging. We have picked the worst aspects of both roles and handed those to our environmental organisations. These organisations are really crucial if we are going to reverse the biodiversity crisis. If we are going to change that trajectory, we need these organisations and their goodwill and we need their volunteers, and we need our people to help.

The minister has said that we are hoping to see the new Nature Conservation Strategy and the Nature Conservation Act this year to implement it. That is really great news. These are such good opportunities—golden opportunities—to strengthen our environmental protection in the ACT. I am really looking forward to working with the minister and with the community to see if we can get some structural reforms and also some proper funding to make those structural reforms protect our environment on the

ground.

I also want to touch briefly on the circular economy aspects. There is so much work here to do. I am focused on the outcomes. That is the kind of person I am. For years last century, I saw that the ACT led the country on recycling and the circular economy. This century we have plateaued. We are recovering around the same amount—75 per cent of what we generate. We have done that for a long, long time. We actually dropped back in the last year. We have dropped back to a much lower recycling rate of 67 per cent. We have a new recycling facility and a new FOGO facility coming. They are taking a while. I have flagged many times my concerns about how those facilities will operate and particularly whether the recycling facility will work.

If we are relying on federal laws like national product stewardship, which is an excellent concept, we need to make sure we actually get those in place. The waste industry itself is now calling for mandatory national product stewardship. I do not know where the dealbreaker is. I do not understand why we have an ACT Labor government, a federal Labor government and an industry all saying the same thing, but we do not seem to actually have that law and that system coming in. Locally, we do not seem to be able to deal with the problem on the ground, because we are waiting for this national change. It would be really good if we could get some clarity around how those changes will actually occur.

We have a great Circular Economy Strategy that was developed last term by Minister Steel. There is quite a lot of work in the delivery on that still to come. I think the bones are really good, but we need quite a lot of attention and delivery to make sure that we are genuinely decarbonising our economy and moving towards a more circular economy.

MR RATTENBURY (Kurrajong) (10.44): It is somewhat frustrating to hear the minister speak on opportunities for the portfolio when it is so clear that the Labor government has no vision on climate for this city. Labor took no policies to the last election. They simply said, “No backward steps,” and “Maintain the Sustainable Household Scheme,” to which they then went and applied an interest rate, and we are now facing the consequences of that position.

Canberrans are concerned about climate change. They consider it to be a serious and pressing problem. They are worried about the future of their planet. They are worried about the inheritance they are leaving for their children. They are concerned about the devastation and destruction we may see as weather gets more extreme. They want to know we are doing everything we can to prevent bushfires from devastating our urban edge. They want to know what we are doing to make sure this city is livable as summer temperatures climb higher and higher every year.

I thank the minister for her statement today, as it did provide some clarity. I was a little stunned by the minister somehow drawing equivalence between the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change consensus report, developed by thousands of scientists, which gives a detailed analysis of the reality, the drivers and the consequences of climate change, and Kevin, who watched a few YouTube videos and visited a couple of websites and who now thinks climate change is a hoax. I think that was an unfortunate framing, and I hoped that we would not see it again. While the minister might not like

talking about the extremes of climate change, and may think this makes the conversation overwhelming, these are the concerns that ordinary Canberrans understand, they bring to us, and they recognise in the science.

These are the concerns that we brought to the Assembly on Tuesday, as part of Extreme Heat Awareness Day, because heat is Australia's deadliest natural disaster and heat events are increasing in line with climate change. What I am inspired by is that Canberrans do not just see the risks; they also see the opportunities that are already here, and they recognise that there are more coming just over the horizon. They want to reap the benefits of the transition to net zero. They want cheap, reliable electric vehicles and the public infrastructure to charge them. They want to get their homes off gas, not just because fossil fuel gas is choking the planet, but because electrification is cleaner, cheaper and easier. And they know that investing in the city's living infrastructure—its trees, green spaces and waterways—will not only cool down our city but make it an even better place to live.

With all this support and goodwill in the community, that is what makes it so surprising that Labor seems to be choosing to coast on the success of previous governments. The minister may say that she inherited challenges in the portfolio, but the best advice we had was that we were on track to meet our legislated emission targets, and that advice was in November 2024. We also always knew that further steps would be needed. That has been evident the whole way along, and that is the point of having things like a climate change strategy. That is why we are dismayed that the climate change strategy was left to expire.

We have seen urban tree canopy cover decreasing. We have seen funding for a government landscape architect, but the role has still not been filled. While the minister is making comments about not rushing and being hasty, what we expect is getting on with the ordinary course of work, not letting the strategy expire, and actually appointing the things that you are holding out as your key mechanism to deliver change. We need to see those people recruited, in the job and starting their work. That is not about rushing or being hasty; that is about getting the job done.

There are two aspects to addressing climate change. The first is our urgent need to reduce fossil fuel emissions. That does need some urgency. The second is our need to adapt our city for a climate future. The Canberra community is looking for leadership and they are looking for vision. They are looking for leaders who are willing to have difficult conversations and move beyond the status quo. I hope that we see that in the Assembly and from the government in 2026.

MISS NUTTALL (Brindabella) (10.48): I rise to respond to the minister's statement outlining the priorities for the water portfolio for 2026, and I will add a couple of little extra bits at the end. It is wonderful that we have a draft out for community consultation on the options to clean up Lake Tuggeranong. It is really cool. We know that the community want urban lakes and catchments that are healthy for all the little critters that live in them, that provide nice amenity to residents and, ideally, a spot for all of us to cool off. In the summer months, it is more important than ever that our natural environment provides safe havens for our communities to escape increasingly severe and frequent extreme heat events.

I have been really pleased to hear from the minister and her staff and officials that the consultation is going well. We need people to be on board with preventing nutrients at the source from entering the lake, including through reducing fertiliser use and changing how we manage green waste. The options paper indicates that this is the biggest opportunity, and I am really keen to see how the community has responded to this proposal and how government incorporates this behaviour change into its final plan.

The options paper also highlights the water-sensitive urban design measures that still have a really important role to play. New water assets, like those that have already been installed across the ACT through the Healthy Waterways program in previous terms, are shown to remove the second greatest amount of phosphorus from the lake, out of all proposed model options. We know that water assets work. They are supported by the community, they support biodiversity, and they help to improve our water quality. We need to ensure that we maintain the ones we have, and we need to keep building them.

This brings me to the broader Healthy Waterways program. In last year's budget, we saw no new funding for Healthy Waterways assets. Over multiple terms, Healthy Waterways has invested millions of dollars in the waterways assets that have had a tangible impact on our water quality. Now, there are no new projects being worked on. The directorate informed me last week that it is currently not scoping any new Healthy Waterways assets projects across the whole ACT. It is focusing only on the Lake Tuggeranong restoration plan.

It might seem odd for me to be concerned about Tuggeranong being prioritised—that does not happen very often—but catchments, creeks and rivers across the ACT are important. They are interconnected and they all deserve love and attention. It would be a huge, missed opportunity to not continue the legacy of the former minister for water, my esteemed colleague Shane Rattenbury, and channel our energy and funding into improving water quality across our precious city.

I was disappointed that the minister has not mentioned any other water projects in her priorities for 2026, and I hope that we can work together to find a solution that benefits our catchments across the ACT. Who knows? Maybe the \$42 million that we collect through the water extraction charge each year that we are obligated to spend on catchment management objectives could be a good source of revenue for these projects.

Additionally, I do not think I heard any mention in the minister's statement of priorities in the agriculture portfolio. I am happy to be proven wrong. Our agriculture sector is a crucial part of the ACT community and economy, whether the ACT government will properly recognise it or not. Our farmers are at the forefront of environmental conservation efforts, with huge swathes of unprotected, threatened communities, like natural temperate grasslands and earless dragons, residing on their land.

We have a local food strategy, but it appears that very little is being done to implement it. Our farmers want to plan for the future of their farms, which means having younger generations live onsite, but our planning rules are inflexible and make this extremely difficult. Many of these issues are interconnected. We can solve them if we want to. I really hope that, in 2026, we can prioritise some of these issues so that our farmers can stop getting left behind in government policy.

Finally, as a young person, I would not forgive myself for sitting on my hands when it comes to the minister's statement on climate change. I find it pretty demoralising to see our minister equivocate the scientifically sound position of those deeply worried about climate change with the sentiment of climate denialism. My generation has watched our planet, our extreme weather events, our heatwaves—

Ms Orr: A point of order.

MR SPEAKER: On a point of order, Minister?

Ms Orr: I feel that my comments have been misrepresented by Miss Nuttall, and previously by Mr Rattenbury, in saying that I was equating not listening to or recognising what is a scientifically evidenced position. That was not the point I was making. The point I was making is that there are a lot of views held in our community and that those views will mean that the way that we engage in the broader conversation will need to recognise that there is a range of positions.

Mr Cocks: A point of order, Mr Speaker.

MR SPEAKER: I will let her complete her point of order. I am assuming she is about to finish.

Mr Cocks: I was waiting for the point of order, and at this stage she has not raised one.

Ms Orr: The point of order was that I have been misrepresented.

MR SPEAKER: I presume it is under standing order 46. I will remind you, Minister, that there is a motion, and you will be able to close the debate on that motion. Should you wish to speak again, you will be able to speak in closing to this motion. Would that be an opportunity for you to respond, perhaps, in the debate?

Ms Orr: My comments were being misrepresented. I feel I have said what I wanted to say. I am happy to speak in closing. I am happy just to leave it at that, too, Mr Speaker.

MR SPEAKER: Thank you, Minister. Miss Nuttall?

MISS NUTTALL: My generation has watched our planet, our extreme weather events, our heatwaves and our bushfires get worse, just over the course of our lifetimes. I hope we have another 70 or 80 years on this beautiful planet, but so many of us are terrified for the future. It seems—and I am happy to be corrected on this—like the minister's goal is to strike a careful balance between the things that will save the planet for future generations and whatever the people who can make eye-watering amounts of money from the fossil fuels destroying our planet think.

If that is the goal, to strike a balance between people and money, we will be too slow and tentative to save people. I agree we need to get more people on board, but if we are going to talk about climate science and climate denialism, you are not actually giving the public an accurate picture of how stuffed we are if we do not act.

I got to hear climate activist Anjali Sharma speak the other day. She says this stuff far better than I do. Go and hear her speak. But I would not have integrity if I did not remind parliamentarians that they have a duty of care to our generation, younger generations and generations to come, to keep us safe from climate change.

MS LEE (Kurrajong) (10.55): Well, there we have it. After more than two decades in government, the Labor minister for the environment, climate change, energy and water has finally admitted what has been suspected for quite some time now—that the ACT is not on track to meet its targets. She has finally admitted, despite having had control, despite having had access to taxpayer funds, despite having had every opportunity to make decisions, that they will not meet their targets. After two decades in government, it is a massive failure.

It seems that the minister is arrogantly relying on the ACT having been an early leader in this space—arrogantly relying on past records. But what she has failed to do, and failed to recognise, and today more clearly than ever, is that the ACT in more recent times has fallen behind in this space.

In the time that I have had the privilege of holding the shadow portfolio for the environment and climate change, the Canberra Liberals have stood with the government and backed initiatives, announcements and promises that were sound and sensible. We stood side by side with all the parties and elected representatives in this place to back 100 per cent renewables, and we all celebrated that, yes, we were able to get that done. But coasting on past performances is what we are now seeing.

One of the greatest disappointments in the statement is a complete lack of acknowledgment of the community-led initiatives when it comes to looking after our environment, and a huge part of that goes to not delivering funding certainty for our environmental groups. In 2019, the Canberra Liberals committed to delivering funding certainty for Landcare groups, because we valued the work that those groups—mostly manned by volunteers—were doing on the ground, and what we could see was very much a passion project for a lot of these people. To have missing in the key priorities for this year the provision of some certainty when it comes to funding for environmental groups is very disappointing.

Water quality continues to be a persistent issue. In fact, one of my very early motions, when I was first elected, was about street sweeping, because, of course, we know that it has a huge impact on our waterways and their health. On this, I wish to acknowledge the former shadow minister for the environment and water, Nicole Lawder, for her tireless work—obviously, for Lake Tuggeranong, but overall, in relation to making sure that our waterways are healthy.

Of course, Nicole's passion for making sure that our waterways are healthy did not stop when she hung up her mantle as the shadow minister for the environment. She continues to advocate very heavily, as a citizen of Tuggeranong, to ensure that that work continues. At the time when I held that portfolio, and when Nicole did, we also, of course, benefited from more than \$70 million from the federal Liberal government being invested into healthy waterways. It is disappointing that that continues to be a persistent issue with no movement.

I was disappointed to hear just this week that the Labor government has rejected the call for a virtual fencing trial—a commitment, of course, that the Canberra Liberals took to the 2024 election. Whilst it is a road safety issue, there were multiple calls from animal rights groups as well, because of the huge impact that it has on our wildlife, especially kangaroos. It is very disappointing that this government has rejected even undertaking a trial to see whether that non-invasive and relatively low-cost measure is something that we want to adopt more broadly in the ACT.

The other aspect that I want to talk about is the fact that, despite being an early adopter of electric vehicles, the ACT has stagnated. It is clear that whatever measures and initiatives that the current Labor government has undertaken have not worked. Certainly, the fact that there has been no movement in relation to making electric vehicle adoption easier for the community is disappointing.

Finally, the area that most people talk to me about quite a lot is in relation to recycling—the food and organics waste, and how we deal with that. We know that, when the new contract was signed, it was a failure from the start by not being able to take on food and organic waste. It seems that we have moved very little since then.

The fact is that we saw, with a bit of fanfare, the minister announcing the consultation for the new climate change strategy, which, as we know, has already been met with not much enthusiasm from the community, but we await the outcome of that. Just to sum up, the minister's statement in relation to her key priorities for this area does not fill me with much confidence. Only time will tell, but what is clear is that, after more than two decades of being in government, of having had the privilege of making decisions, of having had access to millions of taxpayer dollars to make a difference, this Labor government has clearly failed.

MS CARRICK (Murrumbidgee) (11.01): I would also like to make a statement in response to Minister Orr's statement about her priorities for this year. The establishment of the Closing the Gap Subcommittee of Cabinet is an important step for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elected Body. If we are serious about truth-telling and tackling institutional racism, structures like this must deliver practical change, not just good intentions. I will be looking for clear progress on government transformation work and stronger data practices.

On climate, I welcome the commencement of the consultation on the next climate change strategy and the shift to an overarching framework, supported by the long-term action plans. This next strategy must be more than a refresh. Given transport is the major emitter in Canberra, we need to have great public transport services, to ensure mode shift. We need the minister to work with the transport minister to ensure that we have a network that makes it generally easier for people to shift how they travel, by having more connected walking and cycling routes and faster, more reliable public transport. That is how we drive real emissions reductions while keeping the community engaged. The bus lane on Commonwealth Avenue Bridge is working well for people heading north, so we need to look at whether we should keep transit lanes over the bridge into the future.

I would have liked to see a reference to our creeks in the statement, particularly Yarralumla Creek, and the naturalisation of both Sullivans and Yarralumla, to improve

biodiversity outcomes. It is also important to ensure that our catchment groups are funded properly, so that they can manage their Landcare groups and ensure that the passionate volunteers can continue their stewardship of their local environment.

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) (11.03), in reply: Mr Assistant Speaker, after saying previously that I would not add anything further, I would now like to add something further. I have been listening to a few more of the comments around the difference in interpretation, as we will call it, of my words. What became clearer, from what Miss Nuttall continued to say, was that there was a linking of my comments to somehow not respecting the science of climate change or not taking that as being reliable, robust and true.

I would like to state very clearly that I am certainly not a climate science denier, and I certainly do respect and value the input of what climate scientists have to say. We certainly look to get our steer from them, in understanding the challenges and the need, when it comes to what we need to respond to.

What my comments went to was that, within our community, there were a lot of different views, not necessarily informed by the science in every instance, which meant that, as we work through, particularly, this next part of our response to climate change, where we will be asking people to make behavioural changes, more will be asked of people—the stuff that we cannot do without everyone getting involved.

In keeping that social licence for the action that we know we need to take, because of the scientific evidence, we need to continue to work with our community and everyone across the spectrum, from those who do not see an issue at all, to those who see the issue very clearly, know what has to be done and are willing to do it, and everyone in between who needs that support. Even with those who understand an issue, and who have the best intentions, if they become overwhelmed and do not feel supported, that is where we really run a risk of not having the social licence and the input that we need to meet these challenges that are before us.

I can certainly provide the assurances to the chamber that the climate science is very much something that I do believe in. I am not doubting it or questioning it. My thinking and my thoughts go to making sure that we keep the discussion and the focus in such a way that we can bring everyone with us on this journey.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Business, Arts and Creative Industries, Children, Youth and Families, Multicultural Affairs and Skills, Training and Industrial Relations portfolios—government priorities 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) (11.06): I am pleased to once again set out the priorities and key areas of focus for the year ahead. In 2026, this

government will continue delivering its progressive, practical and proven agenda for our community. Through collaboration, planning and sustained effort, we will continue to build on what has been achieved and deliver positive and lasting results.

As Minister for Business, Arts and Creative Industries, my priority is to make Canberra one of the best places in Australia to start, grow and sustain a business, and to position creativity as a central driver of growth. We are continuing to deliver the ACT Small Business Strategy, streamlining interactions with government so businesses get time back to innovate, serve customers and grow. Of the strategy's 52 priority actions, 86 per cent are complete or embedded into ongoing initiatives. For the close to 37,000 businesses now operating in the ACT, of which nearly 97 per cent are small, we are making compliance simpler, supporting more accessible procurement that is more transparent and navigable.

Our Canberra Business Advice and Support Service will continue to provide tailored, end-to-end guidance at every stage of the business lifecycle, from set-up to scale-up. We will also keep backing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander businesses through the Badji program delivered by Coolamon Advisors. Since 2022, Badji has supported more than 100 local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander businesses with marketing, referrals, administration, and pathways to grants and investment.

Mr Assistant Speaker, business and arts intersect in our strong and growing creative industries. In partnership with Screen Canberra, we launched the refreshed Canberra Screen and Games Fund in December. This investment will accelerate our screen and digital games sectors, stimulate local economic activity and showcase Canberra's stories and settings to national and international audiences. Applications from the first round are being assessed now, with successful projects to be announced in the near future. This is part of our broader commitment to creative jobs, export-ready content and a diverse, resilient economy built on knowledge, design and innovation.

This year marks the final year of our current Arts, Culture and Creative Policy 2022-2026. We will use the coming year to review and then refresh the policy, maintaining its core direction and aligning with the national arts policy, while providing a timely update and confirming our plans for the remainder of this term of government. Our focus remains on investing in local artists and organisations, building audiences and increasing access and participation across our diverse community.

We are also delivering our election commitment work towards recognition as a UNESCO City of Design, including holding the inaugural ACT government Design Excellence Awards this year and investing in an expanded Craft + Design Canberra Festival this year.

We will also continue to invest in art for our city's public spaces. I am sure many of us are looking forward to the completion of the new artwork for Garema Place, honouring the late Stasia Dabrowski OAM—affectionately known as Canberra's "Soup Kitchen Lady". This will be the latest addition to the 114 public artworks already across Canberra. Printable public art walking trails for Civic and Tuggeranong are now available via artsACT.

In my Skills, Training and Industrial Relations portfolio, our priority is simple. We want

Canberrans to have every opportunity to build their skills and to find a rewarding career with safe, secure work. At the heart of this is our skills agenda. Vocational learning is the pathway to a career with impact. Those with a VET qualification go to work each day knowing they have the skills and expertise they need to leave a positive mark on our community.

Canberra relies on these people, and their skills, to make our city the great place it is to live. That is why we are investing \$64 million into vocational learning through the National Skills Agreement, and why we continue to develop our VET Sector into one that Canberrans can be proud of. Last year this was demonstrated when Canberran Shane Vincent was named runner-up for Vocational Student of the Year at the Australian Training Awards. Shane works as an inclusion manager, where he helps workplaces become more accessible for people with disabilities and mental health conditions. To build his skills, Shane enrolled in a Certificate IV in Mental Health. This certificate provided practical, hands-on learning that Shane embraced. It empowered him to build on his commitment to mental health advocacy, skilling him to leave a lasting impact on our community. His dedication has received national recognition, and I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate him again for this achievement.

Stories such as these are what we want at the heart of our VET sector. It is why we are investing in continued free TAFE places in 2026, providing Canberrans with more opportunities to uplift their skills in their work or to start a new career journey.

It is also why we are investing \$14 million dollars into supporting VET learners completing their qualifications. In 2026, this support will mean more services available to help students through their studies, and targeted interventions for those falling behind. Complementing this, 2026 will see the establishment of a careers hub to provide the guidance and advice to employers and workers on pathways to upskilling through our VET system. Canberrans know that a career with impact means a career with a VET qualification, and we will always invest in providing them with every opportunity to build their skills.

The ACT government is also committed to supporting safe, secure jobs for Canberrans. The ACT is fortunate to be one of the safest jurisdictions to work, and we are proud of our measures to promote workplace safety. Canberrans expect that our approach to workplace safety adopts best practice, and employers in the ACT by and large do the right thing by their workers. A small minority, however, do not.

In 2026, we will consider the effectiveness of our workplace safety regulation, looking for opportunities to refine practices to ensure widespread compliance. This is upholding our continued commitment that everyone in our community has the right to be safe at work.

In 2026, we will also mark the expansion of the portable long service scheme to the accommodation, food, hairdressing and beauty sectors. Our portable long service leave scheme is something we are proud of in the ACT, providing a fair approach to long service leave in industries where employment is typically less secure.

Mr Assistant Speaker, in my Children, Youth and Families portfolio, my focus remains on delivering early interventions and integrated services to children and young people

so they can grow up safe, supported and connected. Planning is underway for the next stage of the child and family network, building seamless pathways between universal services, targeted programs, and intensive supports—delivered at the right time for each family.

I am also committed to Closing the Gap for First Nations children and young people. We will continue to implement the recommendations from the Our Booris, Our Way report under a partnership agreement that aligns with the national Closing the Gap Agreement, the Safe and Supported National Framework, Next Steps for Our Kids and the ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Agreement.

We are seeing positive results, including the lowest number of Aboriginal and Torres Straits Islander Children in out of home care since 2017, supported by the First Nations Family Response and Engagement Team, delivering culturally grounded diversions and wraparound supports.

I am also focused on youth justice reform. We are progressing work on a youth justice strategic plan to set goals for the next five years, delivering a system that is more therapeutic, inclusive and healing centred. We will strengthen early intervention and diversion services, including through intensive adolescent services for young people with complex needs. These services will be supported by thorough case management, ensuring young people receive a continuity of support as they exit custody.

We are also embedding and refining the system responses implemented to support the lowered minimum age of criminal responsibility. At the heart of this nation-leading reform is the Therapeutic Support Panel for Children and Young People, which brings together a cross-system response, ensuring support for young people at risk of entering the justice system is trauma-informed, culturally safe and developmentally appropriate.

We will continue to platform youth voices through the Youth Advisory Council, the ACT Youth Assembly and targeted consultations led by the Office for Youth Engagement. Grants and scholarships will remain demand driven and outcome focused, with ongoing refinement to ensure fair access and responsiveness to need. We will strengthen pathways for insights from youth-led forums to inform policy development across directorates, including work supporting social cohesion, anti-racism and anti-discrimination, and continue to support First Nations youth leadership and storytelling. In 2025-26, this included recognising Young Canberra Citizen of the Year winner Peter Harris, a young Aboriginal leader.

Over the past eight years, our multicultural community has shared its hopes, challenges and achievements with generosity and candour. In 2026, our focus is to strengthen social cohesion and keep Canberra free from racism, discrimination and hate. Our message is simple: hate has no place here. We will advance the Assembly resolution I presented on 17 September 2025, collaborating with the Justice and Community Safety Directorate on prevention of and early intervention in radicalisation, progressing the Standing Committee on Social Policy's recommendations on extremist ideologies, and supporting work arising from the Tenth Assembly's racial vilification inquiry.

Mr Assistant Speaker, we will align with national efforts, including the National Anti-Racism Framework and the work of the special envoy, and support

implementation of positive duty legislation through sector briefings and clear communications, including a new fact sheet. To celebrate diversity and deepen understanding, we will explore a cultural events calendar on the ACT website so community groups can showcase significant dates and invite wider participation.

Our National Multicultural Festival remains the heartbeat of inclusion. In 2026, we will articulate a long-term vision that honours longstanding communities and embraces new and evolving cultures, ensuring the festival remains vibrant, welcoming and nationally significant. We will support it with the resources and partnerships it needs to thrive.

Mr Assistant Speaker, this is a year for delivery of our practical, progressive and proven agenda. It will be measured not only in outputs but in outcomes that last. We will simplify how businesses work with government, supercharge creative enterprise, and showcase Canberra's design and cultural excellence to the world. We will expand skills and strengthen fair work, modernise our training systems and open doors for more Canberrans to build careers with impact. We will invest in our children, young people and families, embedding early intervention, cultural safety and therapeutic responses, while amplifying youth voices in the decisions that shape their futures. And we will deepen our commitment to a city where every culture belongs, every story is heard and every person is respected.

This work will be made possible because of the dedication of the people that we work with every day—public servants, community leaders, artists, educators, carers, business owners and volunteers. Together, we will keep building a city that is creative, skilled and inclusive, a city that lives its values and looks ahead with confidence. I remain committed to listening, learning and working in partnership to deliver on this government's practical, proven and progressive agenda.

I present the following paper:

Key priorities for 2026—Ministerial statement, 5 February 2026.

I move:

That the Assembly take note of the paper.

MS CLAY (Ginninderra) (11.19): I thank the minister for his update. I will be speaking about some of the arts elements of that, which probably comes as no surprise to anyone in here. We are very much looking forward to seeing delivery of the agreed arts sector funding uplift, which is part way through but not yet fully delivered. In the Greens supply and confidence agreement, the Labor government committed to increase funding for local arts organisations and centres by 25 per cent plus indexation. It would have been good to see that now—to see announcements on that now. The sector is right now going through their grant application process for their multi-year funding, and they understand that they will get this uplift at some point. I gather that the two processes are interlinked, but I think there is still uncertainty as to whether that 25 per cent increase in funding is part of this process, and I think it would be great for people to get some firm commitments on that on timing.

These organisations, our arts communities, are the ones who are building a lot of

community connection and cohesion, and they are really creating Canberra's cultural fabric. They are supporting our artists. They are making sure our artists have somewhere to go, have a pathway for career development, have peers to discuss their work with, and have places to engage and practice. These are places where our audiences can go and enjoy that art and contribute to it. They are a really, really important part of our arts ecosystem here.

A lot of them are really struggling to serve the community due to a lack of proper funding from ACT government, and a lot of them are actually on the brink. We are hearing this across the board—particularly from some of these arts organisations, but I would say it is across the board. They have not been funded well enough to be able to pay their workers at basic salary requirements, and we have seen in the submissions to the budget that pretty much all the arts organisations are in the same situation.

I am looking forward to the development of the next arts, culture and creative policy, with the current one ending this year. I thank the minister's office for an excellent briefing last week, when we got to discuss that. I am really looking forward to more updates about how that will roll out. We are very much looking forward to seeing our arts sector build and grow with these new policies.

I also want to briefly talk about insurance costs. Rocketing insurance is causing a lot of concern for our arts community, but it is causing a lot of concern for a lot of different sectors in society. I was disappointed in the government response to the parliamentary inquiry on insurance. Most of the government responses were "noted". There did not seem to be a lot of genuine engagement with that quite in-depth examination of how insurance costs are affecting our community, our businesses and our organisations at the moment.

I do note the minister was willing to help out the horseracing industry with their WHS insurance. The minister met with them a couple of times and then passed legislation to give them special access to WHS insurance. That is an industry that relies on gambling and animal harm. We are hoping that the minister and government can have that kind of genuine engagement with the rest of our sectors at the moment—with our arts sector who are struggling, but with all of our sectors who are struggling with their insurance and WHS. That support does not necessarily need to be financial support. It might come in the form of research; it might come in the form of helping them navigate the options and the pathway through. But I think Canberra will be disappointed if that kind of engagement is only happening with the horseracing industry and not for others.

I am looking forward to the update soon from the Minister for Women and Minister for the Prevention of Family and Domestic Violence on efforts made to improve safety for women in the ACT. Again, I would remind her, and perhaps she might work with Minister Pettersson, that the Domestic Violence Crisis Service have noted that they have faced annual premium increases of 450 per cent since pre-COVID, and they are very much struggling with the insurance and WHS components of their operating costs. Again, we would love to see a really in-depth, genuine engagement from government with that organisation, as we saw from government with the horseracing industry.

There are a lot of opportunities for government to collaborate across Canberra sectors, and I think we are all hoping for some really good engagement and some practical

suggestions for how to navigate these issues.

MS CARRICK (Murrumbidgee) (11.23): I am interested to know where the needs analysis for arts facilities is up to. I have said it before: I am looking for a more equitable distribution of access to the arts across Canberra. Ms Clay did mention how the arts builds community, and how it is important to Canberra's cultural fabric and an important part of our ecosystem. There is not one arts centre in the Murrumbidgee electorate. So I look forward to participating in the next arts policy to ensure that the distribution of arts facilities and the funding that is available around Canberra is more equitable. Thank you.

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) (11.24), in reply: I would just like to thank members for their contributions following my statement. As always, I am happy to facilitate access to the information members are seeking, so please do reach out, and I will facilitate everything I possibly can.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Police, Fire and Emergency Services, Women, Prevention of Family and Domestic Violence, Corrections and Gaming Reform portfolios—government priorities Ministerial statement

DR PATERSON (Murrumbidgee—Minister for Police, Fire and Emergency Services, Minister for Women, Minister for the Prevention of Family and Domestic Violence, Minister for Corrections and Minister for Gaming Reform) (11.25): I present the following paper:

Key priorities for 2026—Ministerial statement, 5 February 2026.

I move:

That the Assembly take note of the paper.

I rise today to update the Assembly on my priorities for 2026 across each of my portfolio areas, portfolios that go to the heart of community safety, justice and gender equality. These responsibilities are not abstract. They shape the safety of women in their homes, where the victims' voices are centred; how frontline workers are supported; and the ability of our justice system to deliver accountability, rehabilitation and prioritisation of community safety.

My focus remains on practical delivery, evidence-based reform and ensuring frontline services have the resources they need to respond to our growing community. Over the coming year, I will continue to strengthen responses to domestic, family and sexual violence; improve victim-centred policing; support the wellbeing of our emergency services workforce; enhance rehabilitation outcomes in Corrections; reduce gambling-related harm; address the over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in our justice system; and advance gender equality in our community.

A significant priority of mine this year is to progress the criminalisation of coercive control. I will introduce this legislation into the Assembly mid-year, seeking the Assembly's support to criminalise coercive control as a standalone offence. This reform recognises that domestic and family violence is categorised by ongoing patterns of controlling behaviour. We know that coercive control is almost always prevalent in family violence homicides. Further, this week, with the release of the second death-review report, we know that coercive control is also almost always a factor in non-homicide deaths as well.

In developing this legislation, I am committed to embedding the voices and perspectives of victim-survivors. Through the Women's Health Matters Victim Survivor Voices pilot, lived experience is helping to inform a legislative model that is survivor-centred, enforceable and does not create unintended consequences. We will support ACT Policing to enforce this legislation through the delivery of academic-designed training modules covering family violence dynamics, coercive control, and victim-centred, trauma-informed responses. This training will be a three-tiered process embedded permanently across the police training continuum.

Domestic, family and sexual violence is insidious in our society: hidden in our homes, reinforced by shame and silence, and sustained by attitudes that allow it to persist. Addressing it requires not only government action but change at every level of our community. My greatest priority is driving a shift in how our community and human service system understands, recognises and responds to gender-based violence. This year, I will continue work across government and the community sector to deliver a coordinated, responsive and trauma-informed system, which supports victim-survivors and ensures people who use violence are held accountable but are also supported by a range of supports and program opportunities to change their behaviour, to end the violence.

I am focused on finalising the ACT Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Strategy for delivery in mid-2026. This strategy reflects more than two years of comprehensive engagement with victim-survivors, Aboriginal community-controlled organisations, the specialist sector, and broader human services across government and the community. It will set an ambitious, evidence-based agenda to support all Canberrans to be safe from gendered violence at home, in their relationships and in the community. Alongside the strategy, I will launch a first action plan and a monitoring and evaluation framework so there are clear actions for delivery and transparent ways to track progress at both the initiative and system level.

To strengthen coordination across services, the Domestic and Family Violence Information Sharing Scheme is scheduled to commence in November this year. This whole-of-government reform will support increased information sharing to build shared and consistent understandings of risk, promoting safety for victim-survivors and children.

As a nation, we continue to grapple with the disproportionate levels of disadvantage, violence and trauma experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. I will continue to prioritise learning from, being led by and working with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community to understand the pathway forward to implement the

recommendations of the *Long yarn report*.

Addressing domestic, family and sexual violence means giving ACT police the tools they need to centre the wellbeing of victims in their work. In December last year, the Domestic and Family Violence Investigation Unit was re-aligned within ACT Criminal Investigations, alongside the Sexual Offences and Child Abuse portfolio, under a newly created Superintendent of Family and Sexual Violence.

This structural change recognises the specialised investigative role of the Domestic and Family Violence Investigation Unit and the intersection between domestic and family violence, sexual violence, and child abuse. This unit continues to work closely with the Family Violence Safety Action Program, FVSAP, and key partner agencies—including, the Domestic Violence Crisis Service; Children, Youth and Families; and the Canberra Rape Crisis Centre—to support whole-of-sector responses focused on victim-survivor safety.

The Domestic and Family Violence Investigation Unit’s coordination team leads ACT Policing’s training, policy and quality assurance, supporting consistent, best-practice responses and building a contemporary understanding of domestic and family violence trends in the ACT. The work is being supported by continued investment in our workforce. The 2025-26 budget delivered targeted investment in frontline policing, including support for the ACT police’s enterprise agreement, and supported ACT Labor’s ongoing commitment to grow the ACT Policing workforce.

I was proud to see 81 new recruits join ACT Policing last year. From their intensive 24-week training to the graduation, it is really powerful to see the dedication and commitment of our community members. Recruitment remains underway and will continue to strengthen frontline presence, specialist capability and the long-term sustainability of policing across the territory. I look forward to attending more ACT Policing graduation ceremonies throughout this year as we progress the government’s commitment to 150 new police officers by 2029.

To enable our ACT Policing workforce, we must be prioritising fit-for-purpose facilities for the services that support our growing city. Work on a new city police station and headquarters progresses, as government works through the strong industry response to expressions of interest sought by Infrastructure Canberra.

This week, we also begin to deliver our priority reform on firearms policy, driven by the tragic Bondi attack and informed by a national push to ensure that firearm ownership is a privilege, not a right. The government is committed to acting swiftly to ensure our firearms legislation is modern, fit-for-purpose, and meets the needs both of firearms users and the community. In addition, we are working to continue legislative and technical changes needed to support the ACT’s participation in the National Firearms Register. The National Firearms Register will be the most significant uplift to Australia’s firearms management system since the National Firearms Agreement was implemented in 1996.

A strong police force must be supported by a responsive and rehabilitative corrections system. The ACT government recognises the important role of Corrections as part of the broader justice system, in keeping our community safe and in providing appropriate

care, support and opportunities for rehabilitation for people detained in the AMC. As part of this, I am committed to progressing improved access to appropriate education and training opportunities for detainees. I am working with Minister Pettersson to understand how we can engage CIT in this important conversation, to strengthen pathways to learning and employment post-release.

We also know the circumstances of detainees are increasingly complex, particularly for those living with disability, serious mental health conditions and the elderly, in terms of how they are managed in a correctional setting. That is why we will continue to progress design work on new health facilities within the AMC, and I will work closely with Minister Stephen-Smith to ensure Corrections and Justice Health staff are able to work together to manage those with complex needs.

In 2026 we will also respond to the work of the Custodial Inspector in delivering the 2025 Healthy Prison Review, which provides important insights on guidance and opportunities to consider improvements, and establish the board of inquiry into Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander deaths within the AMC. The over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the justice system remains of significant concern. I will continue to work very closely with the Attorney-General and with the Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander affairs, across government, and in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community organisations and leaders, to support culturally appropriate pathways and reduce unnecessary contact with the justice system.

Cabinet has also agreed to a whole-of-government phase 3 action plan under the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Agreement developed with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elected Body. Under the agreed action plan, the directorate has a clear focus on tangible steps over the next 12 months to address over-representation, including by ensuring supports for detainees are in place and have begun before release and are led by Aboriginal community-controlled organisations, with transparent pathways into long-term housing and rehabilitation. Additionally, the action plan will focus on using data to identify discrimination and systemic barriers in the justice system; increase prevention and diversion programs; deliver culturally safe restorative justice; and develop a strategy to address the high rates of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people on remand. Work is also underway to develop a cultural model of service within Corrections.

While several of my portfolios are focused on community safety, I am equally committed to reducing harm across the community, particularly the harm caused by gambling. Only a Labor government is prepared to do the hard work required to tackle the harm caused by poker machines in our community, and only a Labor government will deliver evidence-based gambling harm reduction policy. We recognise the critical role that clubs play in our communities and want to see the development of a sustainable future for the club sector. However, the harm caused by poker machines must be addressed.

In the 2024 ACT Gambling Survey, evidence demonstrated that one in six adults in Canberra experienced gambling harm. And this figure does not demonstrate the significant flow-on impacts of harm on partners, children, family and friends. Nor does this figure capture the intergenerational harm caused. I am strongly focused on both

long- and short-term measures that are required to address this harm.

Central to reducing harm from gambling in the short term is the implementation of mandatory account-based gaming. This will include a range of harm minimisation measures including, but not limited to: mandatory pre-commitment, where people will have to set a limit for how much they are willing to lose; mandatory breaks in play, so people who use poker machines will be forced to take a break after a set period of time; and a revolutionised self-exclusion scheme, which will allow people to exclude from gambling but still participate in activities with family and friends and their community at our clubs.

In the long term the ACT government will continue to reduce the number of poker machines in our suburbs. We are strongly committed to reducing the number of machines to 1,000 by 2045. Reducing the number of machines—that is, reducing the long-term supply, a proven harm reduction measure—will impact future generations. Data from the ACT gambling prevalence survey clearly shows that residents of Molonglo Valley and Weston Creek experience the lowest levels of gambling harm across the territory. This is no surprise. These areas have the fewest number of machines or, in the case of Molonglo, no machines.

The independent inquiry into the future of ACT clubs continues to work, considering pathways to support long-term sustainability while reducing a reliance on poker machine revenue. This inquiry is due to hand its report to government in May, with the government then to respond by August. I look forward to seeing the recommendations and findings of the panel and working with clubs to ensure the government policy provides our community with a thriving and sustainable clubs sector where people are not harmed by gambling.

I have spoken about community safety and harm embedded in our neighbourhoods, but a key priority is also ensuring our emergency services are prepared when they need to step in and respond. I am committed to working with our ambulance, fire, RFS and SES chiefs to strengthen health and wellbeing support for our frontline workforce, the people who step up for our community in the most difficult moments. My priority is ensuring our members have the infrastructure and support they need to do their jobs: rosters that work for them, and the tools required to support the community effectively. And, yes, that includes seeing the electric fire truck back on the road.

The Molonglo Emergency Services Station remains on track for completion mid-2026, with relocation and occupation by ACT Ambulance Service and ACT Fire & Rescue to follow. The facility will deliver contemporary infrastructure, modern equipment and fit-for-purpose resources designed to meet the evolving demands of emergency response, support frontline personnel, and leverage emerging technologies and innovation. We will take forward the learnings from the ACT ambulance roster review and continue recruitment to build a workforce that meets the needs of the growing Canberra community.

I am committed to supporting our volunteer base across our emergency services and improving the gender balance within our firefighting service so that women know they belong in every room, in every role, and that gender is never a barrier to ambition.

I am deeply committed to advancing gender equity in our community to ensure all Canberrans are safe, respected and empowered to fully participate in all aspects of life.

(Extension of time granted.)

Under the current Women's Plan we have made significant, often nation-leading, progress on the issues, including through introducing free abortion care and period products; creating a positive obligation on employers to prevent discrimination and sexual harassment; and building industry pathways for girls and gender-diverse people into the building and construction industry. Whilst I do not have time to list all the achievements of the plan, I recognise there is still much more to do.

In 2026, I will establish the new ministerial Council for Gender Equity to provide me with expert advice on policy, programs and investment to promote gender equity in the ACT. In collaboration with the new council and the community, we will develop the new plan, commencing from 2027, to continue the important work to tackle the structural, systemic and cultural barriers to gender equity.

In 2026, I will continue to work closely with my colleagues to ensure a gender lens is applied to policy and funding decisions across a wide range of portfolios. We will continue to finesse our approach to gender-responsive budgeting and the women's budget statement.

I am here to make a real difference for Canberrans: to improve the lives of women and children, to ensure a safe community, to support those interacting with the justice system, to stand with our first responders, and to reduce the pervasive harm caused by gambling. There is no mistaking that we have significant challenges to address, and I am up for it.

ACT Labor's progressive policy platform is a clear plan for Canberra. Our plan is delivering and will continue to deliver meaningful changes for Canberrans over this term. We do so with a strong sense of fairness, compassion and responsibility. I will continue to progress this work through 2026, and I look forward to keeping the Assembly informed and working with Assembly members on these priorities as we advance. I commend this statement to the Assembly. Thank you.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Children and young people—Children's Education and Care Assurance

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) (11.43): I rise today to talk about the important work that ACT's Children's, Education and Care Assurance, known as CECA, do to regulate and support the safety of children in early childhood education and care sector. I acknowledge that there is a lot of interest in the work of early childhood regulators right now, in this chamber, in the Canberra community, and across the country. I want to give members

in this place more information about how the ACT regulator operates.

There are 374 ECEC services in the ACT, attended by over 31,000 children. CECA is staffed by highly-qualified and experienced officers who are dedicated to supporting the rights and best interests of children and promoting best practice in the early childhood education and care sector. The national law sets out what CECA must do, what powers and enforcement tools it has available, and its functions and obligations.

CECA's primary functions are: assessment and rating of services against the National Quality Standard; compliance and risk audits; investigation of notifications and complaints; and providing education and information about the National Quality Framework. CECA works closely with ACT Policing, the Working with Vulnerable People team, the ACT Ombudsman's Office, the Human Rights Commissioner, the Children's Commissioner, and the Office for Children, Youth and Family Support to promote children's safety and identify and prevent individuals who may pose a risk to children from working directly with them.

CECA is made up of three teams: the Quality Assurance Team, the Audit and Risk Management Team and the Investigation Team. The Quality Assurance Team undertakes the assessment and rating process in accordance with the National Quality Standard. During an assessment, an overall rating is given to a service based on evidence collected across seven quality areas.

Here are some of the quick stats about ratings in the ACT. At 30 June 2025, 350 of the ACT's 374 approved services had a quality rating—that is 94 per cent of services—with 54 services being rated last year. The ACT has the highest proportion of services rated as excellent and exceeding, at 43 per cent. Eighty-seven per cent of ACT services are rated as “meeting” the National Quality Standard or above. Two years ago the Quality Assurance Team began the Quality Engagement Program. This program supports services that are rated “working towards” to improve their governance and leadership, helping to lift the quality of their service to children. Last year, the team supported 36 services through the program, and it is making a difference. Since the program began, the percentage of services rated as “working towards” has reduced from 19 to 12 per cent and is continuing to fall.

The Audit and Risk Management Team is responsible for service risk assessments. This team conducts compliance and risk audits across the sector. The scheduling and frequency of risk assessments are informed by services' quality ratings and compliance records. The higher the risk the more frequent the regulatory visits will be. The audit team has an annual schedule of unannounced compliance audits, and also carries out risk audits in response to incidents and complaints to quickly resolve any specific and immediate risks to children. Last year, CECA carried out 249 compliance audits and 25 risk audits requiring a rapid response.

The Investigation Team assesses notifications, complaints and information about incidents and individuals that may present a risk to the safety, health and wellbeing of children. CECA assessed 2,127 notifications of incidents or complaints last financial year. A wide range of incidences are notifiable, including attendance of emergency services for any reason, injuries requiring immediate medical attention, behavioural incidents that raise a risk of harm, and children being missing or unaccounted for. Most

injuries to children result from slips, trips or falls and are developmentally typical—that is, children being children.

CECA also uses a risk based approach to determine whether further action is required, such as an audit, an investigation or a request for further information. Considerations include whether there may be an ongoing risk to children, the seriousness of the incident or allegation, and the prospects of obtaining any further advice or evidence. The Investigation Team uses their powers to obtain information and evidence to establish what has happened and if any offences might have been committed.

At the end of last financial year, CECA had commenced 82 investigations and 58 investigations had been completed. A further 60 investigations are still in progress. During the period, CECA took 123 compliance actions, including prohibition of individuals from working in the early childhood sector. CECA also works with other enforcement agencies and state and territory regulatory authorities to keep children safe and take action where persons of concern are identified. Another hugely important part of CECA's role is to provide professional development and support focused on continuous improvement, best practice and the National Quality Framework.

This work importantly includes providing timely information to the sector on child safety reforms. CECA works in collaboration with the national authority, ACECQA, and other jurisdictions' regulatory authorities to support and promote continuous quality improvements in the sector. This includes policy and legislative work on the national child safety reforms which will make the sector a safer place for all children. The reforms include the introduction of mandatory child safety and child protection training and the introduction of national educator workforce registers. CECA will continue to work with the Australian government and other states and territories on further national child safety reforms.

To the staff at CECA, I say thank you. They do incredible work. I know they are dedicated, hardworking, professional and absolutely committed to their important regulatory role. I am happy to give them a shout-out in the chamber today.

I present the following paper:

Children's education and care assurance—Ministerial statement, 5 February 2026.

I move:

That the Assembly take note of the paper.

MR EMERSON (Kurrajong) (11.50): I welcome the Minister for Education and Early Childhood's statement today about Children's Education and Care Assurance, the regulator, and the upcoming statement about child safety in early childhood settings. On 2 November, three months ago, the Minister for Education and Early Childhood stated in this chamber: "We have a robust and comprehensive regulatory system." At that point in time, only the government had access to the documents that have now been released. They reveal deeply concerning regulatory failures and system loopholes that have, at best, put children at risk and, at worst, exposed them to significant harm.

The government resisted my push for transparency in this area at every turn, saying that pushing to get these documents released last year was ridiculous, perverse and grubby. It is interesting that now that everyone, not just the government, has access to these documents, the narrative on this issue has finally changed. I guess that is the power of transparency. The minister is now acknowledging that we do have a responsibility to enact change at a local level, but it is not enough for us to allow national reform efforts to protect our children—a clear change in position from what we heard just a few months ago. The minister has indicated that the government will review ratios, consider introducing a mandatory early childhood educator registration scheme, and look at ensuring governing boards in the sector have early childhood experience on them. They are very welcome commitments.

Mr Assistant Speaker, I do not mind being criticised in this place, as I hope you know, for calling for these documents to be released, or for anything else really, but the children at the centre of the call for these documents to be released are the most vulnerable cohort in the ACT. So the question we should be asking when debating these matters is: what is the real impact on children of our failures to ensure quality and safety in the early childhood sector?

While the impact revealed through increased transparency in this sector is sobering, we have learned of communication failures—between centres, the regulator that is the subject of the minister’s statement today, police and Access Canberra—and failures that meant it fell to the mother of a child who had been sexually abused to notify other parents that their children may have been cared for by a child sex offender. Only through that mother’s initiative did another parent learn that their child had also been abused, leading to a further conviction.

The impact includes children being physically and verbally abused by an educator who had previously been convicted of the assault of a child in New South Wales before moving to the ACT and being permitted to work in our early childhood sector. The impact includes a centre that did the right thing by reporting and sacking an educator who faced three separate child sex abuse allegations, only for that educator to be enabled, by the regulatory system we have, to continue to work in the sector for more than 12 months after the third child sex abuse allegation. It is sobering to consider that those allegations were spread over six years and what this means for children and their care over that period of time.

The documents also reveal centres with chronic staffing shortages, leading to inadequate or, in some cases, non-existent supervision, resulting in significant injuries to children, educators being deprived of breaks due to understaffing, and scrupulous profit maximisation, creating impossible pressures on overwhelmed educators to deliver quality education without sufficient support or supplies, sometimes including food. Ultimately, they show deeply troubling incidents of children being neglected.

To this point, the majority of government efforts when it comes to early childhood education and care in the ACT seem to have targeted access and equity. This is welcome—absolutely—but, when it comes to safety, it is hard to see how they have not been asleep at the wheel. The fact that many centres do the right thing and that best practice is common practice across parts of this sector is a crucial fact, but it does not excuse the fact that the existing regulatory framework, described three months ago as

robust and comprehensive, has allowed some providers to create the conditions for children to be neglected here in our community.

I recently asked a question on notice about the Working with Vulnerable People scheme. It was revealed that cardholders may, if they desired, notify the administrators of the scheme of a change in their place of employment, meaning that, if a person chose not to provide this information to Access Canberra and subsequently had their Working with Vulnerable People card cancelled because of nefarious behaviour, their employer may not be notified. We are also the only state or territory that does not have an online card-checking portal to enable employers to check the validity of staff's cards in real time. These are signs of obvious gaps in our regulatory system—obvious gaps.

The minister mentioned in her statement that the national law sets out what CECA must do and what powers and enforcement tools it has at its disposal. One of those enforcement tools is the power to issue infringement notices, except that, in the five years covered by this document release and, I am informed, actually across the entire history of the regulator, not a single fine has been issued—not after particularly egregious child safety incidents that have caused immense harm to some children, including children in our community; not after complaints from educators about poor practices being insisted upon by their employers; and not after centres have repeatedly failed to meet basic quality and safety standards over and over again. Not one fine, ever.

In fact, I understand the government has not even set up the infrastructure to enable fines to be imposed. Issuing fines is a power the government has under the national law, but it is a power they have chosen not to use, despite having had access to an abundant amount of information about system failures—information that has now only been made public through this order for the production of documents, which was resisted and criticised by the government from start to finish.

When the centres that are entrusted with the care of our children fail to protect them, it is the regulatory system's role, the government's role, to intervene and ensure that all children are protected. That has not been happening, much to the dismay of the countless parents, educators and other concerned parents who have contacted my office about this.

The minister also mentioned in her remarks today that the ACT has the highest proportion of services rated as excellent, or exceeding that, in the country. Fantastic news. But this is of little comfort when at least one service in the ACT, as we know through the document release, has had repeated child safety breaches, with no meaningful improvements or behaviour change indicated in these documents, and has had five enforcement actions recorded by the regulator in the last two years—yet this centre has not been reassessed and it remains rated as exceeding national quality standards, including in relation to staffing arrangements. Despite the documents showing an employee complaining to the regulator in the time since the centre was last rated, that centre has been operating below the required educated-to-child ratios almost every day. Right now, you can look up the centre. It is rated as exceeding the National Quality Standard, including in relation to staffing arrangements.

The documents also show multiple centres that have changed hands, leading to worsening safety and quality outcomes, but they have not been reassessed since

changing hands and persist with ratings suggesting to families in our community right now that they are exceeding expectations—exceeding the NQS—despite evidence among the complaints and compliance notices issued in the document released that they are, in fact, not.

I am not here to criticise the efforts of the regulator. People working within CECA do such important work to assess and enforce compliance with the National Quality Standard. I am sure they are under significant pressure at the moment and will have been, particularly over the last 12 months. I echo the minister's gratitude to the staff this morning. It is blatantly clear, though, that the regulator's compliance and effort enforcement capability needs a drastic boost, which in turn means that resourcing must be increased commensurately. It means this needs to be a funding priority for the government.

This was the first of several calls for reform I announced earlier this week. I have also called for the ACT's early childhood strategy to be updated with a renewed focus on children's safety. The current strategy only mentions children's safety once. Children's safety issues in early childhood were clearly not on the government's radar when the strategy was drafted. It is perhaps fair enough, but, with the new information available to us, it is undeniable that this needs to be addressed properly.

I have also called for: land use reforms to safeguard the viability of local community-run centres and to prevent major for-profit providers from monopolising the education and care of our children; the loopholes to be closed in the ACT's Working with Vulnerable People scheme, as I have discussed—it is meant to ensure that people who should not be working with children are reliably kept out of the sector, but they have not been; and the regulator to start actually imposing fines for egregious or repeated child safety breaches. I think most members of our community would be shocked to hear that these calls for reform are not already government policy. To me, they really seem to be the bare minimum. I am also undertaking an online survey to seek community input into further reforms that I look forward to bringing to the Assembly shortly. The reforms in that survey have been shaped through my consultation with educators, families and sector reps over the last six months.

I welcome the government's changed position and the announcement of the minister's plans for reforms here at the territory level. Moving forward, I hope to work constructively with the minister and her office—and I again thank them for the briefings that have been provided in relation to the document release—to ensure the community feedback that I have collected and am receiving can be reflected in those reforms, and I hope the reforms are treated with the urgency they clearly demand.

There are so many incredible educators and centres here in the ACT, but it is not good enough for us to hope that all centres are demonstrating best practice. In doing so, children's wellbeing has been put at risk. That is what these documents show. All educators and centres have been tarred with the same brush. I know the many good actors in the sector feel under siege and that the public scrutiny has created immense pressure on those great Canberrans working in this area. But scrutiny is not the problem; a regulatory framework that has allowed bad actors to enter and remain in the sector is the problem. It is not us paying attention to this issue. I cannot state that clearly enough.

The fact is that the system is not currently set up to support and incentivise best practice education and care. We need to back providers that are delivering excellent education and care to our children, and they need our support to thrive. We also need to clamp down with genuine consequences for those who are not delivering excellent education and care to our children, so that best practice becomes the minimum standard across the ACT.

We owe it to the highly skilled educators who do challenging and often thankless work, including those who first contacted my office about this issue, having left the sector because of the failures they experienced by certain providers to support good staff like them to do high-quality work with children. We also owe it to families who entrust the education and care of their children to other members of our community and should feel confident that, no matter where they drop their child off in the morning, their child will be cared for, with their safety, wellbeing and growth prioritised ahead of anything else. And, of course, most importantly, we owe it to our children, who have the right to grow up in a community that puts what is best for them first, always.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Children and young people—safety in early childhood education and care

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) (12.02): I rise today to present to the Assembly the report titled *Child safety in early childhood settings: Insights from the sector and community*. Nothing is more important than the safety of children. Throughout 2025, the early childhood education and care sector faced significant challenges, marked by heightened public and media attention concerning child safety within the sector. For many, this period is confronting and worrying. Families naturally sought assurance, transparency and clear communication. Services and educators found themselves not only working under considerable pressure in managing their responsibilities to children and families but also navigating the broader public narrative that did not always reflect the strengths, expertise or integrity of the workforce.

Despite this, the sector, which has been calling out for urgent reform for decades, demonstrated resilience, professionalism and a commitment to restoring trust and strengthening safeguards. That is why I initiated a series of roundtable forums last year in response to the growing concerns around child safety in early childhood education and care services. The forums were delivered in partnership with United Workers Union and the ACT parents association and brought together representatives from across the early childhood sector, including peak bodies, early childhood educators, service leaders, academics, parents and carers.

These forums were about listening, learning and leading together. They were about asking challenging questions, sharing examples of best practice and identifying the gaps, both big and small, that must be closed to build a safer, more responsive system. They provided an important opportunity to reaffirm the ACT government's commitment to child safety and wellbeing, and to publicly recognise the

professionalism, dedication and care that educators in the ACT demonstrate every day. They also created a space to outline the work underway, both locally and nationally, to strengthen safety measures and address concerns raised across the country.

The report I am tabling today presents the insights from the roundtable forums in detail. It captures the voices of those who contributed to the forums and shared the themes that emerged throughout the discussions. What is evident from this report is that the early childhood sector is united by a deep and unwavering commitment to the safety and wellbeing of every child. Across all sessions, participants articulated a clear and collective vision for an early childhood system that consistently delivers strong supports for children, genuinely recognises and values its workforce and strengthens engagement with families and the broader community. This report highlights the sector's resolve that meaningful, lasting reform must be grounded in the lived experience of children, educators, service leaders, parents and carers. It emphasises the importance of a system where every child is safe, every educator feels supported and respected, and every family can confidently rely on the quality and integrity of the services their children attend.

Last week I hosted another round of forums. If any of the people who attended those forums or the ones that were held last year is listening now, thank you. Thank you for your time and generosity in sharing your stories and experiences. I have heard you and the government has heard you, and I am committed to turning your feedback into concrete action. While work is currently underway both here in the ACT and nationally to strengthen and support safety and quality in the sector, your voices will help fuel that work and maintain the momentum for reform. I will keep working hard to ensure that we build a stronger and safer system that every child, their family and our community deserves. I thank you again.

I present the following papers:

Child Safety in early childhood settings: Insights from the sector and community—

Minister's Roundtables on Child Safety in early childhood—Report, undated.

Ministerial statement, 5 February 2026.

I move:

That the Assembly take note of the ministerial statement.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Crime—attacks on women—update Ministerial statement

DR PATERSON (Murrumbidgee—Minister for Police, Fire and Emergency Services, Minister for Women, Minister for the Prevention of Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence, Minister for Corrections and Minister for Gaming Reform) (12.07): I rise today to respond to the resolution of 25 June 2025 on improving women's safety in the

ACT.

As Minister for Women and Minister for the Prevention of Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence, I stand today, alongside the Minister for City and Government Services, to reaffirm that the ACT government condemns, unequivocally, all forms of gender-based violence. Our goal is clear: an ACT where women, girls and gender-diverse people feel safe and are safe at home, in their relationships and in public spaces.

Rates of violence against women remain far too high. In the ACT, many women have experienced physical or sexual violence and live with those impacts. While most violence perpetrated in our community is by someone known to the victim, in their home, the fear and harm caused by assaults on women in public spaces are real and unacceptable. Safety is fundamental to equality and participation.

This work is complex, and requires continuous effort, learning and investment to achieve cultural change across institutions, governments and the community. Globally, there is no single approach or strategy which has successfully reduced rates of gender-based violence. We must instead strive to implement diverse and targeted initiatives across a range of areas to ensure there are appropriate responses to violence when it occurs, while also aiming to prevent the commencement or escalation of violence before it starts.

The ACT government is currently progressing a range of relevant initiatives, including release of a 10-year strategy to guide future work and investment in the domestic, family and sexual violence responses, primary prevention initiatives, ongoing targeted community education campaigns, investing in frontline services, gender-sensitive urban designs to improve public safety, and strengthened public transport safety.

Work is well underway on the strategy to prevent and respond to domestic, family and sexual violence across the ACT in the next 10 years. This strategy will take a whole-of-government and whole-of-community approach, promoting the safety of all Canberrans in their homes, relationships and communities. Consultation throughout 2025 with specialist services, Aboriginal community-controlled organisations, community partners and government agencies has informed a listening report to guide the development of the strategy. Victim-survivors' voices are also central to the strategy, and the Victim-Survivor's Voices Pilot, delivered by Women's Health Matters, is providing critical input from those whose expertise is based on their lived experience, ensuring diverse perspectives shape this policy.

I look forward to releasing the strategy midway through this year. The strategy and its action plans will guide the prioritisation, delivery and evaluation of current and future work to address gender-based violence, including what I will speak about now.

The ACT government is committed to primary prevention, attempting to prevent future violence by challenging proscriptive gender stereotypes, by promoting relationships based on respect and equality, and by calling out harmful attitudes and behaviours.

Public schools have adopted a whole-of-school approach to respectful relationships education, embedding gender equality, respect and inclusion through professional learning and an age-appropriate curriculum from kindergarten to year 12. Last year, we

delivered campaigns on affirmative consent and coercive control. Through these campaigns, we seek to strengthen understandings of consent and respectful relationships, particularly among young people.

Gender-based violence is underpinned and reinforced by complex social, political and economic factors, including gender inequality. The current ACT Women's Plan is currently being evaluated, and work will soon commence to inform the next plan, supported by the new women's advisory council to be established in the coming months. This new plan will set the road map for how we promote gender equity in the ACT over the next 10 years. Together, these efforts reflect our commitment to primary prevention, addressing the root causes of violence and building a culture where women, girls and gender-diverse people are safe, respected and empowered.

The resolution that was passed by the Assembly rightly speaks to the importance of investing in our frontline services. These are critical for victim-survivors seeking protection and support, and for perpetrators who wish to change their behaviour. We must ensure that victim-survivors can access the support they need, regardless of when or where they experience violence. Accessible, trauma-informed, responsive services also have the potential to prevent violence from escalating, and they disrupt the cycle of harm, especially for children and young people.

That is why the ACT government funds a range of programs that provide counselling, healthy relationship education, specialist support, and safe spaces for children and families. These initiatives help victim-survivors to heal, feel safe and thrive, while disrupting future cycles of violence.

At the same time, we must also ensure that people who use violence are held accountable and supported to change. With the assistance of the commonwealth government, \$3.37 million is being invested over five years to pilot innovative programs that strengthen accountability and support behaviour change, using approaches tailored to particular cohorts.

The ACT government will continue to invest in frontline domestic, family and sexual violence responses, guided by the forthcoming strategy, to promote safety and reduce gender-based violence, reflecting our unwavering commitment to ensure frontline services are adequately resourced and create safer communities for all Canberrans.

Safety in public spaces is fundamental to women's full participation in our community. Perceptions of safety are shaped by a number of factors, including urban design and broader events that occur in our community. That is why the government has embedded gender-sensitive urban design to create public spaces that are safer, more inclusive and welcoming for all.

The motion calls for a territory-wide rollout of the Gender Sensitive Urban Design Guidelines and an implementation plan. I am pleased to inform the Assembly that the Gender Sensitive Urban Design Guidelines are implemented and embedded in our infrastructure design and upgrades. The Gender Sensitive Urban Design Framework and Toolkit, developed under the Women's Plan, set out principles and practical guidance to make public spaces safer, more inclusive and equitable.

Implementation began in July 2023 as a pilot and has since transitioned to business as usual. These principles are now applied to all new and upgraded public assets, complementing our municipal infrastructure standards. They are not retrospective, but improvements occur incrementally as assets are renewed over their life cycle.

Since adoption, the guidelines have informed upgrades to six shopping precincts and are incorporated into planning for future works funded in the 2025-26 budget, including Charnwood, Mawson, Erindale, Palmerston and Griffith shopping centres. They are also embedded in the City Renewal Authority's master planning process and the ACT Urban Design Guide.

This means that every new path, lighting upgrade and precinct renewal, such as the \$38.2 million active travel investment and the \$20.7 million City Precinct Renewal Program, will apply gender-sensitive principles. These mean improved visibility, lighting and connectivity, addressing factors that shape perceptions of safety for women and girls.

We are also delivering design-led safety improvements in the city centre, including upgraded lighting and paving on City Walk and Petrie Plaza, and major upgrades at the Dickson shops, commencing in early 2026. These interventions enhance sightlines, reduce trip hazards, encourage passive surveillance, and support a vibrant night-time economy while reducing unwanted behaviours.

Activation of public areas plays a vital role in safety. Programs like Winter in the City and Haig Park events attract thousands of visitors, increasing foot traffic and fostering a sense of community. Haig Park's transformation, with new lighting, pathways and over 120 events, shows how thoughtful design and activation can turn spaces historically perceived as unsafe into ones that feel safe and vibrant for all.

The motion also called for improvements to lighting and footpaths. As mentioned, we are investing \$38.2 million over three years through the Active Travel Infrastructure Program, to upgrade paths, renew lighting and build missing links across Canberra. This includes targeted upgrades in Tuggeranong, Woden, Weston, Belconnen and the inner north and south.

Since this motion was passed, the National Capital Authority has begun lighting upgrades, including LED conversions on Anzac Parade and new lighting as part of the Commonwealth Avenue Bridge renewal. I welcome the commonwealth government's significant investment in lighting around Lake Burley Griffin's central basin and surrounds to improve safety and usability of the lake, announced late last year.

In addition to these design and infrastructure improvements, we are taking further steps to ensure safety and inclusion in our community. The Office for Women works with event organisers to undertake women's safety audits when planning major events, ensuring public spaces feel safe, welcoming and inclusive. This has been done, for example, for the upcoming Multicultural Festival, happening this weekend in our city. We are also investing \$6.3 million in sportsground upgrades, including lighting, toilets, parking and female-friendly change rooms, at 15 locations, because safety and inclusion must extend to every part of our community.

The Gender Sensitive Urban Design Guidelines are no longer a pilot; they are the standard. I am pleased to table the implementation update as part of this response. By embedding gender-sensitive design into our planning and infrastructure, and coupling this with activation and advocacy, we are creating a city where women, girls and gender-diverse people can move confidently and participate fully.

Safety in public spaces also includes the transport network. Recent changes to the Road Transport (Public Passenger Services) Amendment Act 2025 and new offences under the regulation give officers powers to deter antisocial behaviour and move on individuals behaving in aggressive or menacing ways at bus stops. From December 2025, transit enforcement officers commenced training to join field transport officers, providing a visible, authoritative presence across the network.

Both groups will be trained in respectful communication and de-escalation techniques to manage escalating situations effectively. Where necessary, officers can refer matters to police, ensuring serious threats are addressed promptly. Move-on powers, combined with CCTV monitoring on all buses and at major interchanges, add further protection and reduce opportunities for harassment, helping not just women, but all passengers feel supported and safe when using public transport.

Gender-based violence is entrenched and complex, and there is no single solution. Safer infrastructure and transport networks enable participation, but infrastructure alone cannot end violence. We must continue to invest in primary prevention initiatives, early intervention and specialist response services, tailored to meet the diverse needs of our community, and we must sustain these efforts over time.

Throughout this term, I am proud to lead efforts to build a Canberra where everyone can live free from violence and fully participate in all the opportunities our beautiful city provides. Together, we can create safer homes, safer streets and a safer future for all.

I present the following papers:

Women's safety improvement—Assembly resolution of 25 June 2025—
Government response—

Gender Sensitive Urban Design (GSUD) Guidelines—Implementation, dated
February 2026.

Ministerial statement, 5 February 2026.

I move:

That the Assembly take note of the ministerial statement.

MS CASTLEY (Yerrabi) (12.19): I rise briefly to respond to the minister's statement by saying that I am a little disappointed. After almost eight months since the Assembly made the resolution, the minister was unable to point to many concrete outcomes for improving women's safety here in the ACT. From my reading of the statement, it is not clear that there will be any material change in women's safety through the rest of this year. Instead, we have a bureaucratic to-do list, we have strategy development, we have consultation, we have education campaigns, we have a pilot program, gender-sensitive

principles, and we have design guidelines, but we do not have safer streets yet. We do not have safer communities, and we do not have a safer territory.

This goes to the heart of the problem with the approach taken by the government. After more than 20 years, they have lost sight of what matters to Canberrans. Our community does not want bureaucratic change or symbolic change. They want material change in their lives.

The minister says that we can create safer homes, safer streets and a safer future, and that is an aspiration that I fully support. But it is not matched by the government's actions, and it is not matched by their track record. Let us not forget that this is the government who shamelessly and cynically slapped ratepayers with a safer families levy, but did not invest the revenue into initiatives that would keep families safe. It took a damning report from the Auditor-General and pressure from this opposition before they finally relented and used the money for what they said they would. They were not serious about safer families then, and they are not serious about safer families now. If they were, the government would focus on the most important changes and leave everything else for future rounds of policy work.

As the Chief Minister likes to remind the Assembly, the territory has limited resources, and we cannot do everything at once. Let us direct our resources to the things that will make the biggest difference, the fastest difference, to improving safety in our community. Let us start with what matters most and work our way down the list. That means criminalising coercive control, improving lighting around parks and public areas, and ensuring our police and prosecutors are properly resourced, and then working to challenge stereotypes and review bathroom design guidelines.

I would like to thank the minister and her office for a briefing, mainly on domestic and family violence, but on understanding the issues with coercive control. I will be like a dog with a bone over this until the end of time, though. It is a little like Ms Carrick and her love of Woden: we all have our things that we will continue to fight for. There are upgrades happening—lighting upgrades. With a scattergun approach and many different things, we need to understand what we can do that will be most effective in the first instance. If we try and do everything at once, we will be in the same place in a year as we are today, with plenty of activity underway, but without actual, meaningful improvement in women's safety.

Government needs to be about outcomes. All of these processes are not ends; they are means to an end, and they are not achievements to be celebrated. The only achievement to celebrate is a community where women and families are safer. Everything else is process, and the sooner we have a government that understands that, the sooner we will have a safer, better Canberra.

MS CARRICK (Murrumbidgee) (12.23): I would like to talk about the gender-sensitive guidelines. I received a text a few days ago from a constituent, saying:

The new bus stops—

this is in Woden—

are about a kilometre to the supermarkets and pushing a trolley is awful. The mall blocks off the door nearest the bus at about 6 or 7 pm, and even I don't feel safe using the Macca's exit or walking across the town square. Besides, the cobbled pathways are murder on the wrist, pushing a trolley. Again, I've adjusted my routine to avoid buses in Woden, but it's not always possible.

It is pretty sad. I get a lot of reports about people not feeling safe in the core of Woden. We have just put in the Youth Foyer and the CIT. In the whole area, pretty much, there are two shops in the town square and the new west plaza, a small cafe and the Red Cross shop. There is nothing active there. We are going to open a road. When I was in the CIT reference group, I said, "Why are we opening a road through the middle of our new public space?" "Why are we parking cars in the middle of our new parking space?" They said, "Because of passive surveillance." Cars will drive through to do the passive surveillance, to see what is going on, rather than having active areas where people are coming together in a destination, in our public spaces. If people do not do so, it is dead.

I really do not know how these gender-sensitive guidelines are working. I hope they do. I hope they come to us. We have had new buildings going in, new public spaces, and, as far as I can see, it has not been done—none of those criteria or characteristics of these gender-sensitive guidelines and how you would apply them to the urban form, with planning. I am pretty horrified by the whole thing.

MR EMERSON (Kurrajong) (12.25): I, too, rise to speak in response to the minister's statement. Members may recall that the debate on this motion and amendments to it focused broadly on the issue of gender-based violence, which is an incredibly important discussion, as is reflected in the minister's statement today, which I welcome. But I would like to take this opportunity to focus on the community voices behind the original motion that my team and I put together.

This was brought about by an email to my office from Kim Elms. It was Kim's voice, along with the voices of other women who continue to contact my office about serious issues with footpaths, lighting and public realm safety, that prompted this motion from me. For those who have not had the privilege of having met Kim, she is a victim-survivor of sexual assault and domestic violence who is running every single suburban street in Canberra—every street—to raise awareness of and funds to prevent coercive control and other forms of gender-based violence. She founded Every Street Matters to create a platform for her message and share her progress. When multiple women were attacked while out running on trails in the ACT in early 2025, Kim organised a solidarity walk to show support and send a signal that we as a community expect all Canberrans to be able to feel safe while out running.

As part of our efforts to improve women's safety while exercising, Kim contacted my office about the need for better lighting in Canberra, particularly around Lake Burley Griffin, in May last year. I wrote to the federal minister for territories on her behalf and started drafting the motion to which the minister has responded today. Kim's advocacy resulted in over 250 new lights being installed or repaired by the National Capital Authority around Lake Burley Griffin in 2025 and led to a \$10 million funding commitment for further upgrades in 2026. It was great to see Senator Katy Gallagher so wholeheartedly on board with this call.

In Kim's initial email to my office, she said there were parts of Lake Burley Griffin that

“as women, we know we just can’t run or walk around in low light or in the dark”. Kim’s advocacy has come to fruition in ways, and our community is better for it. I want to put on record Kim’s achievements in relation to this, and her incredible courage, compassion and deep care for our community.

I welcome the actions that the government is taking to follow through on this advocacy, including turning the Gender Sensitive Urban Design Guidelines that have been piloted into business as usual, moving forward. I am particularly happy with the improvements promised for Civic and Dickson. As Ms Carrick points out, there is still so much more work to do in this area—in Woden, yes; also, particularly in well-established suburbs in my electorate like Ainslie, Turner and Reid, lighting remains patchy at best and a serious hazard at worst. I continue to receive complaints from a range of different community members about these issues.

I also hope to see the government collaborate with the National Capital Authority on work on land that might not be within the government’s remit. The motion included calls to do this work and, while it is unclear whether the government has actually done it, I will say that, in all my interactions with the National Capital Authority regarding lighting around Lake Burley Griffin, they have been very responsive and have acted quickly. I was glad to bump into them this week at the national showcase, up on the hill, and thank them for their work on this and its impacts on my constituents, including the many runners who have reported back to me that they have noticed the positive changes around the lake and are really grateful for them.

As the original motion was widened, I will speak very briefly to the range of other serious issues for women’s safety that the minister’s response has addressed today. At the end of last year, Sue Webeck, Chief Executive of the Domestic Violence Crisis Service, reported that victims were waiting days for a response after calling their crisis line, and that around half of all calls to the service were not answered. The reason for the significant delay, according to Ms Webeck, is that they “simply don’t have the money to meet the demand of the community”. This lack of funding, and the range of other complex issues that the minister touched on, is borne out in brutal reports like this week’s release of the Domestic and Family Violence Review.

As we already know, this kind of violence is overwhelmingly perpetrated by men, and victims are disproportionately women. As a man deeply concerned about this issue, I hope to have further opportunities to debate this issue and have a part in addressing it in this place. I welcome the government’s work on prevention programs in schools and in our community, as well as targeting behaviour change later in life. I intend to continue to use my position in this Assembly to push for meaningful action in this area.

Of course, there is no single answer to the question of women’s safety, but there are steps that we can take to address components of this complex problem, including by listening to people when they tell us they feel unsafe because of problems with our city’s infrastructure.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Public Accounts and Administration—Standing Committee Reference

MR EMERSON (Kurrajong) (12.30): I move:

That notwithstanding the terms of the Assembly's resolution of 3 December 2025, the inquiry into Specialist Disability Accommodation service delivery through Housing ACT be transferred to the Standing Committee on Public Accounts and Administration.

I rise today, as Chair of the Standing Committee on Social Policy, to request the transfer of the inquiry into specialist disability accommodation service delivery through Housing ACT to the Standing Committee on Public Accounts and Administration.

On 3 December 2025, the Assembly resolved to refer an inquiry into specialist disability accommodation service delivery through Housing ACT to the appropriate committee. This was subsequently referred to the Standing Committee on Social Policy.

The committee considered the inquiry at its meeting on 27 January 2026. Given the terms of reference relate to financial management and the budget and revenue implications relating to the delivery of specialist disability accommodation, the committee considers the Standing Committee on Public Accounts and Administration is the most appropriate committee to undertake the inquiry.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Economics, Industry and Recreation—Standing Committee Statement by chair

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS (Brindabella) (12.32): Pursuant to standing order 246A, I wish to make a statement on behalf of the Standing Committee on Economics, Industry and Recreation relating to a referred petition.

E-petition 63 of 2025, which is about sporting facilities in north Canberra, was tabled on 24 September 2024 and referred to this committee for potential inquiry. As the subject of the petition relates to one of our current open inquiries, the committee has resolved to incorporate it into our inquiry into barriers and opportunities for participation in community sports in the ACT, which is currently in the report drafting phase.

Environment and Planning—Standing Committee Statement by chair

MS CLAY (Ginninderra) (12.32): Pursuant to standing order 246A, I wish to make a statement on behalf of the Standing Committee on Environment and Planning relating to its inquiry into the missing middle housing reforms.

On 2 December 2025, in response to a statement informing the Assembly of the committee's adoption of the inquiry into draft major plan amendment 04—missing middle housing reforms, the Minister for Planning and Sustainable Development made a statement, by leave, containing remarks to which the committee has agreed to respond.

One remark related to submissions to the inquiry. Minister Steel told the Assembly:

I think it is reasonable to shorten the length of some of the processes that the inquiry needs to undertake ... given the extensive consultation that has already occurred and given that many of the submissions, I understand, being made to the inquiry are saying that there should be either a shortened inquiry or no inquiry at all ...

While the committee has now published 25 submissions to the inquiry, when Minister Steel's statement was made, the committee had received two submissions and had published none. Neither of these submissions contained remarks about the potential length of the committee's inquiry or stated that it should not be happening. Indeed, one of the two submissions, published on 18 December 2025, contains a detailed critique of the draft amendment itself and the ACT government consultation process.

Public statements by the responsible minister that this inquiry should not be happening could affect the conduct of the inquiry. Stakeholders hearing such commentary could conclude that DPA-04 is essentially a *fait accompli*, and that their input to the inquiry is pointless.

The committee notes that it has only received 25 submissions on this inquiry, which is unusual for a major planning inquiry that will affect the zoning for all of Canberra. Other inquiries this term received between 12 and 109 submissions, with those matters affecting more people typically receiving more submissions. The committee cannot know what it is never told and, with such commentary in the public domain, the committee may never hear from some of those who have something to say on the issue.

The committee has deliberated on whether Mr Steel sought to influence the evidence to the inquiry and falsely reported its proceedings. We decided to bring this matter to the attention of the Assembly, as per standing order 259.

On 2 December 2025, Minister Steel further noted that he had "written to the inquiry twice, requesting that they undertake their inquiry into the missing middle housing reforms as soon as possible", and that the committee "had decided to undertake the inquiry in the maximum timeframe possible under the Planning Act—that being six months".

In closing his statement by leave on 2 December, Minister Steel said that he hoped the committee "can report back to the Assembly that they intend to do an inquiry in a shorter timeframe". This statement came after the committee's letter of 6 November 2025 informing the minister of the inquiry. The letter states both that the committee will seek to report as expeditiously as possible and that this may necessitate the full six months afforded by the referral and the relevant provisions of the Planning Act.

As noted by Minister Steel on 2 December 2025, in making the referral, he did not make use of the provisions in the Planning Act to determine a reporting date between three and six months. In doing so, pursuant to statute, the final date for the committee's report automatically becomes 30 April 2026. If the minister needed or wished to have the inquiry conclude earlier than 30 April, he had the statutory ability to make this happen. He chose not to do this.

The committee has come to the view that it would not be prudent to make guarantees regarding a specific date ahead of 30 April, as the committee is still gathering evidence, with hearings due to take place on 10 and 12 February 2026. We do not know what we will find, until we find it. We do not know what stakeholders have to say about this major reform, until they say it. Making firm commitments to guarantee reporting ahead of the statutorily defined reporting date could preclude public input and participation.

The committee has deliberated on whether Mr Steel has sought to interfere with the free exercise of its authority and decided to raise this matter in the Assembly, as per standing order 259.

MS TOUGH(Brindabella) (12.37), by leave: I want to make a very short statement to put on the record that, during committee deliberations on this statement, I abstained from supporting it. I will not go into committee deliberations, but I want to thank my fellow committee members for the collegiate approach. I did not feel that I had the time to properly consider it, ahead of the sittings, so I could not put my name to it.

MR CAIN(Ginninderra) (12.37), by leave: I want to speak, as a member of this Assembly, to the statement that has been read on behalf of the committee, and say how disappointed I am in the minister for planning for cajoling the closest thing that this Assembly has to a voice of review of the proceedings of this Assembly—that is, the standing committees of this Assembly. For him to lecture a standing committee on his own program, when he even voted to shorten the number of sitting weeks this year—which created his own problem; this government has created its own problem—and to accuse the committee of holding up housing reform in the ACT, is absolutely atrocious and an insult to our Westminster system of government. It is an absolute insult.

Quite frankly, the minister for failures has presided over some of the most disastrous wastages in the territory’s history. The minister for icebergs: I do not know why the Chief Minister gives him projects and ships to steer, because he will find an iceberg to hit. We called on the Chief Minister yesterday to answer, “What is the threshold for a minister losing your confidence?” We got a pretty bland answer.

This minister, the most poorly performed minister, arguably, in the chamber—although I have other views on that as well—is a very poorly performing minister, who has not shown himself to be capable of exercising functions on some very key projects. For him to then try and shift blame for the lack of housing supply in the territory to a standing committee is an insult to our system of parliament, and he should be ashamed. I am sorry that he is not here to hear these words and to hear that statement directly.

Legal Affairs—Standing Committee

Statement by chair

MS BARRY (Ginninderra) (12.39): Pursuant to standing order 246A, I wish to make a statement on behalf of the Standing Committee on Legal Affairs relating to a referred petition, e-petition 040-25, on keeping the rent relief fund.

The petition was referred to the committee on 2 September 2025 and considered at a private meeting on 10 December 2025, following notification of the government’s response. The government response noted that, while the fund was initially established

as a temporary COVID-19 measure, the fund had been re-established twice, most recently ceasing on 4 July 2025, to respond to post-pandemic cost-of-living pressures. The government also advised that some allocated funds were unspent, outlined other cost-of-living measures in the 2025-26 budget and detailed measures to assist renters in the ACT.

The government response also highlighted that feedback on the scheme indicated a significant, positive impact on renters. Additional benefits included encouraging individuals in crisis to seek assistance from the provider Care, resulting in referrals and access to services, such as financial counselling, legal support and emergency relief programs.

Despite interest in further examining issues raised in the petition, the committee is mindful of its current workload, with five active inquiries underway. The government also advised that it was intended that a reinvigorated version of the fund would be reinstated from 1 July 2026. Consequently, the committee resolved not to undertake an inquiry into the petition at this time. The committee thanks the government for advising of the intention to reinstate the fund and thanks all those who participated in the petition.

Standing orders—suspension

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

That so much of the standing orders be suspended as would prevent Notice No 2, Executive business relating to a motion to amend the resolution of the Assembly concerning ACT Ambulance Service roster review being called on forthwith.

ACT Ambulance Service—staffing Amendment to Assembly resolution

DR PATERSON (Murrumbidgee—Minister for Police, Fire and Emergency Services, Minister for Women, Minister for the Prevention of Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence, Minister for Corrections and Minister for Gaming Reform) (12.42): I move:

That the resolution of the Assembly of 2 December 2025 relating to ACT Ambulance Service Roster—Improvement be amended to omit (3)(d) and substitute with:

“(d) report back to the Assembly in the second sitting week of March 2026 on the progress of implementation of recommendations in the ACT Ambulance Service Roster Review.”.

The motion today is a simple procedural correction to a drafting error in a motion agreed to by the Assembly on 2 December, when the Assembly considered a motion moved by Ms Morris in relation to the ACT Ambulance Service, which stated that the government should report back to the Assembly in the first sitting week of 2026. This was an error, in terms of what was agreed to in the Assembly—that the government should report back by the second sitting week in March 2026. This motion omits the current part (3)(d) and substitutes new wording to give effect to a reporting date of the second sitting week in March.

I thank Ms Morris and colleagues in the Canberra Liberals for supporting this amendment, and I look forward to reporting back to the Assembly in the second sitting week in March, in response to this motion.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Sitting suspended from 12.44 to 2.00 pm

Questions without notice

Budget—deficit

MR PARTON: My question is to the Chief Minister. Chief Minister, in recent days, your government has been spinning the alleged strong economic management ahead of what is expected to be another disastrous mid-year budget update from the Treasurer.

Can I ask, Chief Minister: in the context of a budget and/or a mid-year budget update, on exactly how many occasions have you or the current Treasurer, steadfastly promised a surplus over the forward estimates?

MR BARR: Given the ones we have delivered, through 2017-2018 and—

Mr Parton: It's 20 times. I can tell you.

MR BARR: Well, you know the answer to the question! Why did you bother wasting your time Mr Parton?

Given, of course, the COVID period, the Mr Fluffy crisis and the global financial crisis that impacted the budgets of all Australian governments, we have made significant improvements and sought to restore the budget to balance and surplus, and that is the trajectory which the government is now on with the fiscal strategy that we have outlined.

MR PARTON: Chief Minister, given that you and your government have promised a surplus on at least 20 separate occasions, how many times have you actually delivered one?

MR BARR: The fiscal aggregate history of the territory is reported in the budget papers, and there have been headline net operating balance surpluses; I believe 2017-18 is one. There have been a number of balanced budgets over that time as well, and there have also been deficits.

MR COCKS: Chief Minister, why should Canberrans believe that you are not lying this time, when you have lied on almost every other occasion?

MR BARR: I believe that would be unparliamentary language, Mr Speaker.

MR SPEAKER: Mr Cocks, can you re-phrase that? I think the word "lying" would be unparliamentary. I will give you the opportunity to come up with something a little less confronting.

MR COCKS: Chief Minister, why should Canberrans believe that you are not presenting misleading information this time—

MR SPEAKER: You can withdraw “lying” and “misleading” please, Mr Cocks. Unless you want to come in here with a substantive motion, accusing the Chief Minister, potentially, of lying and misleading is unparliamentary. I invite you to withdraw it.

MR COCKS: I withdraw.

MR SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr Cocks.

Budget—priorities

MR RATTENBURY: My question is to the Minister for Finance. Minister, in your ministerial statement on priorities for the year ahead, you referred to an “expenditure priorities framework” that the government has implemented. Can you explain the framework and table any documents that set it out, to reassure the community that your expenditure priorities reflect theirs?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I thank Mr Rattenbury for the question. I will take the detail on notice, in terms of tabling the document. I can assure Mr Rattenbury that this is not a document that sets out specific priorities of government. It is a framework that guides each directorate when it is considering its priorities against the stated priorities of government, which are outlined in budget papers and in the ministerial statements that have been given this week. They are the things that I would look to, if I were the opposition or the Greens, in terms of what the government’s priorities are for delivering for 2026. The prioritisation framework is about directorates going through all of their resourcing, staffing and the way that they are structured to ensure that the resources that the government has to bring to bear to deliver those priorities are appropriately directed towards the priorities of government and the priorities of the community.

MR RATTENBURY Minister, can I get clarity? What is the objective of the framework? Is it to deliver a particular budget outcome or to deliver particular outcomes for the community?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: The objective is to ensure that the efficiencies of \$282 million that were identified in the 2025-26 budget are achieved by reducing the rate of growth of employee and non-employee costs. We were very clear about that in the context of the 2025-26 budget. It is essentially about saying that we have set budgets for each directorate for the 2025-26 year and the forward estimates. This is about supporting, in a structured way, each directorate to collaborate, from the leadership through to the workforce, to ensure that each directorate is both living within its means and continuing to deliver on the priorities that are set out in the budget, in our election commitments, and in our governing agreement with the Greens political party and Mr Emerson, so that we can efficiently and effectively target the resources that we have. Having grown the public service by about 25 per cent over the last six years, we are now saying that we need to focus those resources on delivering the priorities that have been identified in budgets and other statements.

MS CLAY: Minister, how does climate action feature in your expenditure priorities

framework?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: Taking strong climate action remains a priority for the government, but that is not, as I have described, what the prioritisation framework is about. It is effectively an administrative framework that is supporting every directorate to look at the resources that they have and how those resources can be most efficiently targeted.

It is true that ACT Labor has been in government for more than 20 years. It is always timely to have a look at all the things that have been done over time and whether there are opportunities to re-prioritise resourcing. But I can assure Ms Clay and the ACT Greens political party that taking strong climate action remains a priority for this government, and that is why Ms Orr last week released consultation on the new climate change strategy, and it is why we will continue to invest in climate and environment initiatives.

Schools—senior secondary language courses

MR EMERSON: My question is to the Minister for Education and Early Childhood. Last year, following the announcement that the provision of a centralised specialist language-learning offering would be lost to the winding up of CIT Solutions, Minister, you said in this chamber that senior secondary students who wanted to pursue a language not offered by their in-area schools could apply for “out-of-area enrolment consideration at a college that offers the students choice in language”. Recent FOI documents revealed the government is now capping out-of-area enrolments for a number of public colleges, including Narrabundah College, which is known for its languages program, including Chinese, French, Japanese, Spanish and Korean. Minister, how do these out-of-area enrolment caps align with your advice to students to enrol in out-of-area colleges to study languages that are not available at their local school?

MS BERRY: It will depend on each individual circumstance. I am happy to follow up for any student that Mr Emerson may be aware of who might be experiencing the circumstances where a school is out of a priority enrolment area—a student who wants to join a school for a particular language program. I am not aware of any at this point in time. We are almost one week into this year of school, but I have not had any issues raised with me at this time.

MR EMERSON: Minister, has the government modelled the impact of out-of-area enrolment caps on already declining enrolments in government schools, including in relation to language studies?

MS BERRY: I am not clear on what the connection is. Could you repeat the start of that question? It did not make a lot of sense to me.

MR SPEAKER: Mr Emerson, are you happy to repeat the start?

MR EMERSON: Sure. Has the government modelled the impact of out-of-area enrolment caps on already declining enrolments in government schools, including in relation to language studies, given that not enrolling in the language study that you want

might mean that you would study in a different school instead?

MS BERRY: They are completely irrelevant to each other, I think. No; there is no study into that. They are pretty irrelevant to each other. The question does not make sense.

MS BARRY: Minister, how many students who applied for an out-of-area enrolment for the purpose of continuing their chosen language studies in 2026 have been rejected?

MS BERRY: As I said, I have not been contacted by anybody at this stage with regard to any concerns about their applications. If Ms Barry is aware of anybody, she might like to get them in touch with my office so that I can—

Mr Cain: How many? You should take it on notice.

MS BERRY: I just answered the question.

Mr Cain: No, you haven't.

Mr Parton: No, you didn't. You said you don't know.

MS BERRY: No; I said I have not been contacted by anybody.

MR SPEAKER: Members! The minister is answering the question.

MS BERRY: I think I have answered the question and, if Ms Barry is aware of anybody, she should put them in touch with me and I can follow up for them.

Mr Cocks: Mr Speaker, on a point of order: under standing order 118AA, I believe that the minister has not answered the question, which was in relation to the number of students who were rejected, not the number who had contacted her.

MR SPEAKER: The question is about how many, and she has said she is not aware of any. That is my understanding of her answer.

Mr Cocks: Is that what she said?

MR SPEAKER: That is what I heard. The minister does not want to take any further element on notice, but, from my point of view, she was asked how many and she is not aware of any. She has answered the question—maybe not to your satisfaction, but she has answered it.

Schools—senior secondary language courses

MISS NUTTALL: My question is also to the Minister for Education. Minister, as we have just discussed, during the debate on the final sitting day of last year, you agreed to the motion before the Assembly to ensure that senior secondary students that wish to study a secondary language have the ability to do so in 2026. Minister, kids went back to school on Monday. What concrete actions have been taken since the debate to implement those commitments and ensure that year 11s and year 12s can continue their study of secondary languages this year?

MS BERRY: I think those commitments were made in this Assembly, and certainly the Education Directorate is aware of those commitments. As far as I am aware—I have not heard any different—those commitments have been implemented.

MISS NUTTALL: Minister, do you centrally track the number of students who have to go to another college due to the lack of language offerings at their in-area college? Do you also track how many were unable to go to that college?

Ms Berry: Me personally? Is that the question?

MISS NUTTALL: I can clarify that, if that is okay. Does the Education Directorate track these numbers?

MS BERRY: I will have to take that question on notice. I am not sure whether they would track that. If they were to track them, there may be circumstances where they might not fall under that particular category. It might be under a range of different categories that they have moved to a different college. I will ask the directorate if that information is available and provide it to the Assembly.

MR BRADDOCK: Minister, did the directorate contact every family with a year 10 student studying languages and talk them through the options they have for continuing this language training in years 11 and 12?

MS BERRY: I will take that question on notice.

Justice—anti-vilification laws

MS TOUGH: My question is to the Chief Minister. Chief Minister, why is the ACT government seeking to strengthen the territory's anti-vilification laws, and what values are these reforms intended to uphold?

Mr Cain: That is not very tough!

MR BARR: That is very juvenile.

MR SPEAKER: I must say I did not hear it Mr Barr but if you could just get on with answering the question that would be great.

MR BARR: Indeed, thank you Mr Speaker and I thank Ms Tough for the question. We are pursuing these laws because there is no place for vilification, discrimination or hate speech in the ACT. The government supports laws that promote social cohesion by drawing a clear line between disagreement and dehumanisation and between belief and harm directed at others. We committed to this at the 2024 election, to review and strengthen hate crime and serious vilification laws to ensure that they remain fit for purpose. Vilification is increasingly manifesting in new ways such as online abuse and coded language and symbolism and is often amplified in our community when global conflicts are felt locally. A review is therefore necessary to ensure the law appropriately reflects contemporary forms of harm as they are experienced in daily life. In considering this reform the review will consider human rights impacts and it will be conducted in

close consultation with those with lived experience, alongside those responsible for both applying and enforcing the law.

MS TOUGH: Chief Minister, how will ACT vilification laws work alongside commonwealth hate speech laws to provide clearer protections for Canberrans?

MR BARR: Territory anti-vilification and hate crime laws will sit alongside commonwealth laws, and, in some instances, expand protections and play a critical role in addressing harm where it is felt most in local communities. The recent commonwealth amendments have further criminalised hateful conduct and ensured that those that seek to spread hate, division and radicalisation are met with severe penalties. There are, however, constitutional limits to the extent of the commonwealth's power to enact criminal laws. It is also important to ensure that local civil laws are appropriately tailored to meet the needs of our community. Any reforms to strengthen ACT laws will continue to be complementary to those at the federal law and uphold human rights.

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: Chief Minister, how will the ACT government ensure that strengthening anti-vilification laws does not limit legitimate debate or freedom of expression?

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: I thank Mr Werner-Gibbings for what is a very good question. Any reforms need to carefully consider human rights impacts whilst safeguarding freedom of expression and legitimate debate. Freedom of expression is a fundamental right in our democracy, but it is not without limits. It must be exercised responsibly and with respect to the rights of others. It should not be used to excuse conduct that demeans or discriminates against others.

Equally, protecting people from discrimination must never be used to silence legitimate debate or the open exchange of ideas. Any limits must be clear and they must be precise so people can understand the law and regulate their conduct accordingly. These laws must also preserve space for fair reporting and for reasonable and honest expression in academic, artistic, scientific and research contexts, as well as in public interest discussion and debate. The government's view is that a fair and inclusive Canberra is one where people are free to speak, to question and to debate, but not at the expense of the dignity and respect of others.

Schools—literacy and numeracy

MS CARRICK: My question is to the Minister for Education and Early Childhood, and it is about Strong Foundations.

Minister, the 2024 Strong Foundations independent report states that the government would implement all eight recommendations from the final report of the Literacy and Numeracy Education Expert Panel. The report states that the expert panel will undertake an annual independent review of implementation and report directly on progress to the government.

It also states that for recommendation 6, that the 2024 priority action is to review current approaches to tiered support, that includes small group learning. And the 2025 priority action is to trial new small group learning models in different schools to identify the

best approach.

Minister, in 2025, did you review and trial small group learning models to identify the best approach?

MS BERRY: I do have a report coming up on the Strong Foundations work, which will be released in coming weeks. If Ms Carrick is amenable, it might be appropriate for her to wait for that report to be released, and I can provide that information in a fulsome way. Or I could just take it on notice and provide it to you, in a couple of weeks, when the report is released.

MR SPEAKER: I take it that in one fashion or another, you are taking it on notice then, Minister?

MS BERRY: Yes, indeed.

MS CARRICK: Minister, how many schools will implement tiered support or small group learning in 2026? And when will it be fully implemented across all public schools?

MS BERRY: I will take that on notice. And release that information, if it is appropriate, with the report.

MS LEE: Minister, is that report that you refer to in answer to Ms Carrick's question, the annual expert panel's independent review? And will you table it in the Assembly once it is available?

MS BERRY: Yes, and yes.

Budget—election commitments

MS MORRIS: My question is to the Treasurer. Treasurer, are all of ACT Labor's 2024 election commitments fully funded in the current budget and forward estimates?

MR STEEL: I thank the member for her question. We have debated this actively this term, and of course the ACT government responded to the Assembly resolution when we directly debated this in the chamber—I think it was last year—and provided our response in relation to that. We consider, through each budget, proposals that are put forward to deliver on the commitments that we have made in the election. We will continue to do that in future budgets, as we did in the budget last year.

MS MORRIS: What is the total value of unfunded commitments?

MR STEEL: I thank the member for her question. Not every commitment has a cost associated with it. A lot of them are policy commitments, commitments to introduce legislation, and some of them do come with a cost and that is appropriately considered through the budget process—

Mr Parton: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. The question was very specific: what is the total value of unfunded commitments? I would ask you to draw the Treasurer to

answer that question.

MR SPEAKER: I uphold the point of order. It is about the volume. You are saying that some are funded and some are unfunded—

MR STEEL: I cannot answer that—

MR SPEAKER: If you cannot that is fine, but if you could be relevant.

MR STEEL: I will tell you why and explain, if I can. We will consider those commitments through future budgets. We are only really at the beginning of this term of government. We have only gone through one budget process since the beginning of the term, so we will consider delivering each of the commitments that have funding requirements and resource requirements through the budget. Many of them will use existing resources of government to deliver those priorities, and until we have gone through every budget in this term with a commitment, I cannot provide that answer. But we will be updating the community regularly and tracking against our election promises, as we did last year.

MR PARTON: Treasurer, what impact will these unfunded commitments have on the ACT budget bottom line?

MR STEEL: We consider, in every budget, the proposals that we made at the election that we committed to. They are considered through the development of business cases, where we understand the costs of delivering those projects as well as the benefits to the community and how they can be delivered. The exact way that they are delivered may not necessarily be spelt out in the election commitment itself, which may be high-level. It really depends on the commitment. We will consider those as we progress through each budget cycle and provide an update transparently through the release of the budget.

Budget—deficit

MS LEE: My question is to the Treasurer. Treasurer, which infrastructure projects are scheduled to be completed this term, and are they fully funded in the current budget and forward estimates?

MR STEEL: I will take that question on notice and see what I can provide. I point Ms Lee to the statement that we make in the budget, which does provide information about the infrastructure program, as well as all the other public documents on the Built for CBR website, where it shows indicative timeframes for projects, depending on where they are up to, and it provides the community with an insight about what we are delivering. I think it is very well known, the infrastructure projects that are underway. But there are a lot of them, particularly some of the smaller projects, and information is available there. I will see what I can provide, and point Ms Lee to the relevant public sources of information.

MS LEE: Whilst the Treasurer is taking that first question on notice, can he also come back to the Assembly with the total value of the unfunded aspect of the infrastructure projects due to be completed this term?

MR STEEL: That is directly the same question that was asked in the previous question, where I provided an answer and said we will consider that in every budget. I cannot provide that information because we are still in the term, and we have several budgets to go.

Ms Lee: A point of order, Mr Speaker.

MR SPEAKER: A point of order, Ms Lee?

Ms Lee: Mr Speaker, that is a different question. If he does not know, he can just take it on notice.

MR SPEAKER: Treasurer?

MR STEEL: I think I have answered the question.

MR MILLIGAN: What impact will these potential unfunded commitments have on the ACT budget bottom line?

MR STEEL: As I said, we still have several budgets to go in the term, where we will be considering the delivery of the infrastructure pipeline. We set out the commitments that we have made. I encourage the opposition to interrogate the budgets, when we release them, and have a look at how we are tracking against the delivery of the commitments that we have made to deliver infrastructure for the community. We know what the track record of the opposition is, which is to oppose infrastructure projects, so they would never be delivered under a Liberal government.

Mr Cocks: Mr Speaker—

MR SPEAKER: Mr Cocks, a point of order?

Mr Cocks: On a point of order, by moving into that discussion point, the Treasurer is now debating the question.

MR SPEAKER: I would agree that he is, Mr Cocks. I uphold the point of order and ask you not to debate but simply to answer, Treasurer.

North Canberra Hospital—freestanding birth centre

MS CLAY: My question is to the Minister for Health. In 2023, the Assembly unanimously agreed to a Greens' motion, backing over 3,200 Canberrans, to determine a model for a freestanding birth centre as part of, or complimentary to, the new north-side hospital development. Progression on this is part of the Greens Supply and Confidence Agreement in the Labor government. The feasibility study recommended a standalone birth centre, separate to the hospital building. I really appreciated the briefing from your officials the other week. Can you provide an update on whether there will be a standalone birth centre or a freestanding birth centre that is separate from the hospital building in stage 1 of the north-side hospital plans?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I thank Ms Clay for the question. I want to start by assuring

her and the Assembly that we remain committed to realising the birth centre project in the context of the more than \$1 billion north-side hospital that the Canberra Liberals no longer seem to support. We have sought—

MR COCKS: Mr Speaker, on a point of order: by making the claim that the Canberra Liberals do not support it, the minister is now debating the question.

MR SPEAKER: I ask you to be directly relevant to answering the question and not get into the policy decisions of other parties.

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: Will do, Mr Speaker. We have sought to move forward in step with the community and clinicians to develop practical and deliverable options to offer continuity of midwifery care in a home-like environment, focusing on low-risk pregnancies and birth that does not require medical intervention. For context, the North Canberra Hospital currently has six birthing suites that use the obstetric model and two birth centre birthing rooms. The allocation of birthing rooms between obstetrics and the new birth centre model is being determined as part of the detailed design of the new north-side hospital. The model of care principles for the new birth centre's service are being developed through consultation with CHS midwives, First Nations people and birth centre stakeholders.

As Ms Clay is aware and has indicated, a feasibility study was released in May last year. It assessed different birth centre models and was developed with input from a working group of subject matter experts. The study considered stakeholder feedback and data on birth trends in the ACT, as well as current evidence on birth centre models. That study recommended a standalone birth centre. I would note, however, that it also identified examples of those. Townsville University was one. I would describe the Townsville University birth centre as “stand-alongside”. I am happy to elaborate on that language issue.

MS CLAY: If early designs only recreate the status quo of a birth centre inside the hospital, which we already have, can you tell me when you will meet the parliamentary commitment and the promise to the community to build a standalone birth centre, separate from the hospital?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I thank Ms Clay for the supplementary, which allows me to go on. As Ms Clay has indicated, the feasibility study defines a stand-alongside birth centre as “located within the same building as the main maternity unit, but on a separate floor or in a distinct area”, and a standalone birth centre as a “separate building on the hospital campus that is connected to the main hospital a via covered walkway to enable a safe, effective and dignified transfer of mothers and birth people by hospital staff without the need for an ambulance”. For the feasibility study, the term “adjacent” was used to define “within immediate proximity or directly connected to the hospital to allow for rapid, non-ambulance transfers by the hospital medical team”.

So two design responses for the birth centre have been developed as part of the collaborative process that Infrastructure Canberra and Canberra Health Services have been undertaking. Those were a stand-alongside birth centre located on the ground floor of the new main building, so it would be part of the new main building development but would have a separate ground-floor entrance and, rather than being connected to the

building by a covered walkway, it would be connected by a back door. That is the model that Townsville University Hospital has, which is one of the models that was raised in the original debate in 2023 as something we should look at, which indeed I did.

The alternative at the moment, in terms of feasibility, would be a standalone birth centre using the current Intensive Care Unit building after the Intensive Care Unit relocates to the new facility. That would obviously be a later timeframe for delivery. At the moment, the ground-floor stand-alongside location which can support a home-like birthing environment and evolving models of care is appearing to be the preferred option.

MISS NUTTALL: Are either of the options that you mentioned in the function brief or the master plan for stage 2?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: The consultative group was brought together by CHS, including staff and a range of stakeholders, and they were presented with both of those options on 10 December last year, including the key design opportunities and constraints. While there were mixed views on the options, the majority agreed that the benefit of having a ground-floor option which could be delivered sooner was preferred. However, further consultation will occur with staff, midwives, consumers and Birthing with Country groups to explore whether the ground-floor stand-alongside option can meet the privacy and home-like experience expectations. That will be co-design process. Consultation sessions are scheduled for 19 February and 26 March 2026. Following these sessions, the project team will develop a plan and strategy to present to broader stakeholders, going specifically to Miss Nuttall's question about where we are up to in terms of design.

I would like to emphasise that no final decision has been taken, noting that we need to weigh up the practical benefits of delivering a birth centre in a timely and practical way within the constraints that we face in undertaking a brownfield development. As I have indicated to Ms Clay, I recognise that there is no perfect answer here, but we will continue to engage and collaborate with stakeholders. I want to take the opportunity to thank the birth centre advocates. I look forward to meeting with advocates, Ms Clay and the College of Midwives to further discuss the practical options that are available to us and which one is going to work best.

Budget—public service pay

MR COCKS: My question is to the Treasurer. In December the ACT government made its public service pay offer as part of the EBA negotiations. The proposed pay increase is three per cent in year 1 with additional increases in years 2 and 3. Have these pay increases been fully funded in the current budget and forward estimates?

MR STEEL: I thank the member for his question. There is provision in the budget to take into account a future enterprise agreement that may be struck with the employee representatives. Those negotiations are currently underway. We look forward to updating the community about that as negotiations in good faith continue. At the conclusion of those, of course, that will be reflected transparently in the budget report on that. I am not going to pre-condition the negotiations in relation to the budget. But certainly we will be updating the community at the right time about the outcome from a financial point of view.

MR COCKS: Treasurer, is the current budget provision fully funded for the current amount and would it be sufficient to cover the higher rates being achieved in other places, given the commentary we have heard around this often not being sufficient?

MR STEEL: The offer has not been accepted yet. Once it is, it will certainly be reflected in the budget. I will update that following the agreement, as part of the budget process.

MR CAIN: Treasurer, what impact will these unfunded commitments have on the ACT budget bottom line?

MR STEEL: Again, I reject the premise of the question. We will of course update the community on any financial impact of any agreed offer in relation to the negotiations on a new enterprise agreement for the ACT public service.

Budget—critical services

MS BARRY: My question is to the Treasurer. Treasurer, a significant number of contracts for the delivery of critical social and community services are issued on an annual basis. Is the funding required to maintain the current level of service delivery by the community sector included in the forward estimates of the current budget?

MR STEEL: I thank the member for her question. This is a matter that we have been discussing with the community sector, including representatives and peak bodies like ACTCOSS, to make sure that in the upcoming budget process we are considering any potential future funding arrangements and where they may be ceasing, whether we need to consider those in the budget process early to give notice in relation to those organisations about what future funding they may have, particularly to inform staffing decisions. It was one of the reasons why we agreed to bring forward the budget to the Assembly. It will help to provide certainty about the new financial year, whilst also taking into account the outcomes of the commonwealth budget which are important to core decisions about those contracts as well.

Mr Parton: Point of order on relevance. The question is very simply, is the funding required to maintain the current level of service delivery in the forward estimates in the current budget and I do not think the Treasurer is going anywhere near that.

MR STEEL: I will take on notice that information. Certainly that is part of the budget considerations we make every year about what contracts may be coming up. One of the other things that we will certainly be looking at is whether we can better align future ACT government contracts, particularly with community sector partners, so that they are not necessarily expiring on 30 June. It might be at another time of year, preferably not Christmas, to be able to provide certainty to community sector partners.

MS BARRY: The Treasurer may need to take this on notice as well. How much additional money is needed to be added to the forward estimates to maintain the current level of service delivery by the community sector?

MR STEEL: I thank the member for her question. I am sure that will be what we look

at as part of the budget process and I have committed to come back already in the answer to the earlier question, which I will. Any ceasing programs will need to be considered. Some of those programs are genuinely ceasing and there may not be any need for further funding. Some of them may need to continue and there may often be provisions already within the budget for consideration and for commissioning processes, in the case of the community sector, to be undertaken to be able to determine which organisation, for example, the funding may go to. I will come back with some further information on notice.

MR COCKS: Treasurer, what impact will these unfunded services have on the ACT budget bottom line?

MR STEEL: Well, that will be outlined in the budget in relation to what services we are prepared to fund and we outline that transparently every year.

Health—public hospitals

MR COCKS: Mr Speaker, my question is to the Minister for Health. Minister, as of today, right now, how many hospitals does the ACT government own and operate?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: The ACT government owns the Canberra Hospital. It depends how you count that. So Centenary Hospital for Women and Children is separately—sorry, I do not need my fingers to count, Mr Parton, if that is what you are suggesting. I know you might. So the Canberra Hospital and Centenary Hospital for Women and Children are separately identified, so that would be two. University of Canberra Hospital and North Canberra Hospital. The QEII Hospital, which the ACT government owns but we do not operate—it is operated by Tresillian—is also counted as a hospital for some purposes. Then, of course, there are a range of other health facilities. So it is hard for me to then answer the question beyond that without understanding the purpose of Mr Cocks's question.

MR COCKS: Given the clarity around that question, how many additional hospitals will the northside hospital project add, and what will the total number of government hospitals be following the completion of that project?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: So the new northside hospital will replace the current, very aged facility at North Canberra Hospital, just as the new critical services building at the Canberra Hospital has replaced critical services infrastructure like the intensive care unit and the emergency department at Canberra Hospital. Because our major hospitals are around 50—

Mr Parton: Point of order, Mr Speaker, and it is on relevance. The question was very specifically, how many hospitals will the northside hospital project add to the total number of hospitals? And I would direct, if you could, the minister to be relevant to the question.

MR SPEAKER: The minister said that it will replace the existing hospital. By that, I presume she means that it replaces like-for-like.

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: So I will clarify. It will add zero new hospitals in terms of

numbers, but what it will add is a state-of-the-art modern hospital that can meet the needs of Canberrans for decades to come, something that the current North Canberra Hospital cannot do. Those buildings are reaching end-of-life. Anyone who looks at that in any sense would understand that when you have hospital infrastructure that is 50 years old, it needs to be replaced. That is why we are committed to a new northside hospital to deliver a modern, state-of-the-art facility for Canberra's northside. And is why we have delivered a critical services building on the Canberra Hospital campus, an expansion of the Centenary Hospital for Women and Children, and we are working through the delivery of the Canberra Hospital Master Plan, because every hospital needs to grow and be modernised if it is going to meet the needs of Canberrans and those in the surrounding regions for the decades ahead.

MR MILLIGAN: When did the government's commitment to a new northside hospital become a knock-down rebuild of an already operating hospital?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: ACT Labor's commitment to the new northside hospital has always been a replacement for the current hospital on the northside, recognising that we also have the University of Canberra Hospital, which was actually initially a partial expansion and replacement of capacity—recognising the need to expand hospital capacity in that rehabilitation space. So we did deliver the new University of Canberra Hospital in 2018 as part of that recognition of the need to deliver new hospital infrastructure for the people of the ACT.

The new northside hospital will deliver new state-of-the-art, modern facilities; a fantastic place for patients, families and carers, and for our incredible dedicated staff to work in; an expansion of hospital facilities on Canberra's northside; just as the new Critical Services Building at Canberra Hospital has delivered a patient-centred, fantastic facility about which I continue to get significant compliments.

Canberra Health Services—staff

MR PARTON: My question is to the Minister for Health. Minister, in your ministerial statement on 4 February, you indicated that there would be 501 new graduates joining CHS in 2026. Are these new graduates filling new positions or are they filling existing vacancies?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: Every year our hospitals and health services have a turnover of staff that is natural, as every workplace does. We bring in new graduates to refresh our workforce every year: new nurses, new midwives, new allied health professionals and new junior doctors are all coming in to refresh the workforce and to build a pipeline of skilled workers for the future, because it is inevitable that staff will move. They will move interstate. They will move overseas. They will take leave to have a family. They will switch to another job outside the hospital system. This is how the refresh of our public service works. What I can say to Mr Parton in relation to new and existing jobs is that we have an establishment of full-time equivalent positions at Canberra Health Services and the new graduate intake is part of that establishment of full-time equivalent positions.

MR PARTON: Minister, are all the 501 new positions fully funded in the current budget and forward estimates?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: Yes, our staffing—the full-time equivalent position establishment—is funded. As the Treasurer has indicated, the fact that we do not need a second appropriation bill, and we will not be coming to the Assembly to ask for additional appropriation for this financial year—

Mr Parton: Oh, well done! Good on you!

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: Well, it is the first time for a few years that we have not had to have a second appropriation, and I do want to recognise the work that Canberra Health Services, in particular, has done to ensure it is living within the budget that it has. It is considering looking at efficiencies and sustainability, and the financial sustainability work that it has done is enabling it to deliver more services for Canberrans at the cost of the appropriation that it has available to it.

MS CASTLEY: Minister, of the new staff, could you give us a breakdown of how many doctors, nurses and administrative staff?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I think that I gave that in my ministerial statement yesterday, but from recollection, if I did not—actually, I will not try and do the whole thing from recollection. I will take the detail of the question on notice, and in the meantime, I will refer Ms Castley to my ministerial statement yesterday. I can say, unsurprisingly, the vast majority of those staff are nurses and midwives.

Parking—disability parking

MR CAIN: My question is to the Minister for Disability, Carers and Community Services. Minister, continued construction work from the light rail and other works in Civic have drastically reduced the number of available disability car parking spaces throughout the district. A recent social media post by a local wheelchair user described how they attempted to access disability parking at the Magistrates Court, only to end up having to park three blocks away. Minister, what actions have you taken to advocate—Minister, I know you are looking elsewhere here, but the question is to you, Minister Orr. I am looking at you, Minister—

MR SPEAKER: Mr Cain.

MR CAIN: Minister, what actions have you taken—

MR SPEAKER: Mr Cain, address your question to the chair.

MR CAIN: I beg your pardon, Mr Speaker. Minister Orr, what actions have you taken to advocate for those Canberrans with a disability to access suitable car parking close to critical government services?

MS ORR: Given Mr Cain's comments in asking his question, I do not think he will be satisfied with the answer that I will provide, which is that I will take it on notice and seek further guidance from the responsible minister. Certainly, in answering Mr Cain's question, I have many conversations and provide much feedback—and I have seen the post that he is referring to—across all portfolios that my colleagues hold, regarding

ways that we can provide the feedback that we get, as to where we can see improvements can be made. Implementing these within individual portfolios is the responsibility of the minister who holds that portfolio.

As I said, I will take Mr Cain's question on notice—getting him the information on that specific instance. Certainly, I can give him my assurance that this is known to me, and I do advocate to all my colleagues when these matters come to my attention.

MR CAIN: Minister, were you consulted on the closure of disabled car park spaces throughout the city, by your fellow ministers in particular, and on the likely impact this would have on those Canberrans with a disability? If not, why not?

MS ORR: Again, I will take the substance of that question on notice, and I will seek some advice from my colleagues as to what processes were followed in these particular approvals, noting that there is a lot of—

Opposition members interjecting—

MS ORR: Mr Speaker, I would like to provide my answer, but I am getting quite distracted by the interjections. I note that there is a lot of regulation and guidance governing how these matters are approached; certainly, that would have been a big determinant regarding what was actually done. I can certainly seek advice from my colleagues who are responsible for these projects as to whether any further actions or matters have been raised.

MR MILLIGAN: Minister, are you confident that Canberrans with a disability can access suitable disabled car spaces within close proximity to central government services?

Mr Pettersson: A point of order.

MR SPEAKER: Yes, Mr Pettersson?

Mr Pettersson: Mr Milligan is asking for an expression of opinion.

MR SPEAKER: He is asking if she is confident that they will be able to access it. I think it is reasonable that the minister can answer that. She is the minister responsible. I think that whether or not there are enough car parks is a reasonable question to ask. I do not think it is expressing a matter of opinion. I accept that the way it was worded was a bit loose, but it is a reasonable question.

MS ORR: I certainly appreciate Mr Pettersson's enthusiasm for the standing orders. In answering Mr Milligan's question, I will have to remind myself of what it was, given all the conversation that has just occurred. Could you repeat the question, please?

MR MILLIGAN: Are you confident that there are enough disability car parks close enough to ACT government services?

MS ORR: It might sound like there could be a yes or no answer to the question, but it is not actually a matter of saying yes or no. When we talk about whether there are

enough spaces close to something, it is also about the proximity, how it is accessed, and what the needs of the person are, because there are different needs, depending on what the disability might be.

I think it is fair to say that there is recognition across the whole government that removing impediments within the built environment is an area of continual improvement, and there is much more that can be done. I would certainly be loath to say yes or no, because I do not think that actually reflects the task or the process that we have. Do we always get it right? Does everyone always get it right? No, clearly not, because there is more work to be done in this particular area, and there is this need for a response. While it might not be the yes or no answer that Mr Milligan was potentially asking for, certainly, it is one where I think we can acknowledge that improvements can always be made, and we will continue to make those improvements.

National Multicultural Festival 2026

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: My question is to the Minister for Multicultural Affairs. Minister, the National Multicultural Festival returns this weekend. What can Canberrans look forward to as part of the festival?

MR PETTERSSON: I thank Mr Werner-Gibbings for the question. As we all know, this weekend is the best weekend on Canberra's calendar. The National Multicultural Festival is back again, for its 20th year, and promises a magical experience where you can travel the world, all without leaving our city centre. In just one weekend, you can see the country music legend Troy Cassar-Daley live; for mouth-watering delicacies, join a Pisco Sour masterclass; learn how to make Tibetan momos; or celebrate the Swedish Midsummer around the maypole.

Whether you have been attending the festival for years or it is your very first time, the Multicultural Festival has plenty of amazing new experiences. Music lovers can enjoy performances from hip hop artist L-FRESH the Lion; the all-female Mexican mariachi band, Queen of Hearts; and the extraordinary Solomon Islands singer, Charles Maimarosia. Foodies will love the cooking demonstrations from passionate home cooks, as well as some of Canberra's most accomplished chefs, including Mal Hanslow of Pilot, and Tristan Rebbettes of Lunetta. And, if you are into comedy, you will want to check out the Lip Syncs and Laughs comedy and drag show featuring Canberra's own Katrin Praseli, alongside comedy legends, Anisa Nandaula and Michael Hing, and Deadly Deities drag queen and performance artist, Dyan Tai.

With over 260 stalls at the festival and over 250 performances and activities, visitors can taste authentic dishes from across the globe and discover handmade crafts, traditional clothing and cultural displays that celebrate heritage and artistry. There are lots of fun activities for families and kids, including puppetry and interactive experiences. At this year's Multicultural Festival, there is truly something for everyone, and I encourage everyone to get out there and enjoy it.

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: Minister, how has the government supported our multicultural community to participate in the festival?

MR PETTERSSON: I thank Mr Werner-Gibbings for the supplementary. The

National Multicultural Festival would not be the great event it is without the active and enthusiastic participation of our wonderful Canberra community. This year, the ACT government has invested \$220,000 in grants to support broader community participation. A key of that funding is projects that promote community participation and cultural diversity, including language and social inclusion at the festival. I am pleased to share with members that 75 local community groups and performers have been given funding for cultural showcases and community performances at the 2026 festival. Examples include big events: the Australia Colombia Friendship Association for their Latin Carnivale showcase, and Africa 2 Australia Incorporated for their Jambo Jamboree Showcase.

MS TOUGH: Minister, how is the ACT government supporting businesses in the city to be a part of the celebrations?

MR PETTERSSON: I thank Ms Tough for the supplementary. Businesses in the city centre and Braddon were invited to apply for grants of up to \$1,000 to deliver multicultural-themed activations during the 2026 National Multicultural Festival. The program encouraged businesses to create experiences that reflect the richness of Canberra's multicultural community. Participating businesses are being promoted through festival marketing channels, including online listings, social media and printed materials. Fourteen local businesses have received grants, including Amici Wine Bar and Deli, Luna Bar, POP Canberra, Status Golf, and many more. The activations supported by this investment will benefit our local businesses, bring more people to the festival and increase the festival's overall economic impact.

Last year, the festival added nearly \$20 million to our local economy. This is money into our community groups, supporting their activities throughout the year; this is money into our civic hospitality and retail businesses, enabling them to hire more people; and this is money spent in our hotels and accommodation businesses, driving our visitor economy. The Multicultural Festival is rightly one of Canberra's most loved events. It is a wonderful celebration of our diversity, offering something for everyone. It provides our community groups with a major fundraising opportunity to support our local businesses and it drives our economy. I cannot wait to see you all there.

Parking—long stay parking

MS CASTLEY: My question is to the Minister for City Services. A number of local tradespeople have reached out to me complaining about limited and high-cost access to parking options around worksites in the ACT. Has the government considered allowing extended duration parking or a parking voucher scheme for local tradies?

MS CHEYNE: I thank Ms Castley for the question. The short answer is that there are a range of different options available for tradespersons for parking depending on the nature of the work and the worksite. I know that the parking voucher system has been explored in other jurisdictions, not in our jurisdiction—and I do not believe has in some time. What I understand from some other jurisdictions is that it is largely limited to tradespersons doing residential jobs.

In the ACT, when there are residential jobs, generally our residential streets do not have parking limits on them in terms of time. But they do have limits in terms of perhaps the

space that might be available for a tradesperson. So things can be worked through for an individual, but, if they want a dedicated space to be assigned to them that is on public unleased land, they have to pay a commercial fee.

Then, if we are talking about a broader worksite, like a large building development, usually what would occur is that the principal contractor would work with Roads ACT, go through that permit system and have some dedicated parking for contractors available, and they pay a commercial fee for that.

MS CASTLEY: Minister, how is a tradie supposed to work a full day onsite if the only local parking options are limited to two or four hours? I think Turner was one of the areas raised with me.

MS CHEYNE: Without knowing the specifics, I would really need to check. I would certainly encourage Ms Castley or her office to speak with mine so we can see if we can find a solution. To try and be as helpful as possible, it would depend on exactly the nature of the worksite and some of the other restrictions in the area. If it is Turner, it does seem to me that it is probably going to be a site that does have limited parking availability.

We would expect that parking onsite would be the best solution for many of our tradespersons. But, where there are block size restrictions or boundary-to-boundary builds—and, if it is Turner, that sounds like it is probably what it is going to be—often the common solutions if it is a larger site is that the principal contractors would be seeking to explore private leased land parking nearby, creating shuttle bus services or staging the construction. But it really does depend on exactly the nature of the worksite in that arrangement. So I am very happy to look at that further.

MR CAIN: Minister, will you table in this Assembly the options that you have studied in other jurisdictions that they have chosen to provide to relieve parking pressure on tradies, and will you work with the opposition here to implement some of those more beneficial approaches in the ACT?

MS CHEYNE: I am certainly happy to work with the opposition on potential solutions that they might be aware of that might be useful in the ACT. To clarify the question that I think Mr Cain asked, or the premise he put to me, I do not believe that there has been any recent study in the directorate on other parking options. I think that we have thought that the suite has largely been working. But, from the questions today, it seems like there is some feedback that there might be some room to move here. So I am very happy to look at that and to take some advice from other jurisdictions as well.

Planning—Waters Edge, Greenway

MISS NUTTALL: My question is to the Minister for Planning and Sustainable Development. Minister, my constituents from Waters Edge have spoken to a lack of consultation on the proposed path near their homes. When they reached out to the proponent of the development application once it was approved, the proponent indicated that the matter now once again sat with government as the proposal has moved into the detailed design stage. Minister, has the proponent referred the residents' request for consultation during the detailed design phase to you or to your directorate?

MR STEEL: I thank Miss Nuttall for her question. I will take it on notice simply because I think I have already indicated to her that this did not sit with me in previous correspondence to her about this matter. I think it sits with Minister Berry and has been with the Suburban Land Agency, but I will come back on notice. I will confer with my colleagues about that and come back to the Assembly with some information, but I have provided that information, I think it was on notice, to Miss Nuttall from a previous question in the Assembly last year.

MISS NUTTALL: Minister, how will you or your government consult with residents of Waters Edge on the detailed design phase going forward?

MR STEEL: Again, I will take that part on notice and see if there is some information we can get from the proponent. It does not sit with me. I really do not have that many infrastructure projects in my portfolio anymore, aside from light rail and the Woden interchange. They are with other ministers and I will seek some advice from them to get the answer.

MS CLAY: Minister, for you or the responsible minister, will residents have to wait for the development application stage to be approved before they get consulted?

MR STEEL: Again, I will seek to take that on notice.

Mr Barr: Ten percent more efficient than yesterday, Mr Speaker. We are on a roll! All further questions can be placed on the notice paper.

Supplementary answers to questions without notice

Public schools—access to generative AI

MS BERRY: I did say this yesterday, but just for clarity, I will provide an answer to the question on notice that I took yesterday from Ms Lee around AI in ACT public schools. The Education Directorate has taken a staged and responsible approach to the adoption of AI. In term 4 2025 approved generative AI tools, Google Gemini and NotebookLM, were enabled for teacher use across ACT public schools. This initial stage supports the educators to develop familiarity and confidence with the technology and provides critical insights to inform future classroom and student-facing implementation.

Targeted student trials are planned during 2026, beginning with the ACT public school college students first, and this will inform the future and broader access to arrangements. Decisions regarding access to AI technologies have been made through established education, ICT and cybersecurity governance processes that enable these matters to be considered with the right expertise involved. These decisions are also informed by risk assessments and the directorate's responsibilities to ensure student safety, protect personal information, maintain secure systems and uphold the integrity of the assessment.

Schools—literacy and numeracy programs

MS BERRY: Mr Speaker, I also have a second supplementary answer. I am not sure if

this is an explanation or a correction of information I provided yesterday during an answer. Ms Carrick asked a question about small group classes and that these were being conducted in this year as part of phase one of the implementation of the Strong Foundations review work. That is not the case. What is happening in phase one is that they are reviewing current approaches to tiered supports across all schools, identifying multi-tiered systems of support models to test in 2026. But as I said, I will have more information when I release the report into the actions that have been taken so far.

Papers

MR STEEL (Murrumbidgee—Treasurer, Minister for Planning and Sustainable Development, Minister for Heritage and Minister for Transport) (3.07): Pursuant to section 20A of the Financial Management Act 1996, I present the 2025-26 budget review:

Budget 2025-2026—Financial Management Act, pursuant to section 20A—
Budget Review, dated February 2026.

I seek leave to make a statement in relation to the papers.

Leave granted.

MR STEEL: I rise today to present the 2025-2026 budget review that provides an update on the territory's finances in accordance with section 20A of the Financial Management Act 1996. Today's budget update shows that the government's fiscal strategy is delivering on its objectives to ensure Canberrans have access to the high-quality services they expect while we improve the budget position through responsible fiscal management.

The budget review shows a significant improvement of \$632 million in the Headline Net Operating Balance from the 2024-25 deficit of \$1.1 billion to a forecast deficit of \$499.1 million in 2025-26. Importantly, the budget position continues to improve each year over the forward estimates, returning to cash operating surpluses from 2026-27 and a Headline Net Operating Balance surplus from 2027-28. The ACT economy continues to perform strongly, growing faster than all states and territories. We have now had 29 continuous years of uninterrupted economic growth in the territory, with an increase in Gross State Product of 3.5 per cent in 2024-25. This is supported by strong public demand, continued real wage growth and very high labour force participation.

There are numerous headwinds in the national economy. This has required some changes to the economic forecasts. The budget review makes an upwards revision of half a percentage point to the forecast for Consumer Price Index growth in 2025-26, with a quarter percentage point increase in the forecast for 2026-27. The forecast for employment growth has been revised down slightly, to 1½ per cent in 2025-26, largely reflecting the flow on effects of the ABS re-benchmarking labour force data. There are further modest downward revisions to the population forecasts as a result of updated ABS data. The outlook for growth in the Wage Price Index has been revised up to 3.5 per cent in 2025-26 and real wages continue to grow.

The government will continue to monitor the risks that a range of external factors pose, including the impact of inflation, interest rates and the impact of geopolitical events on the global economy. Importantly, the local economy continues to have a positive outlook, with continued growth in GSP and State Final Demand both unchanged from the 2025-26 budget. We expect household consumption to remain unchanged from our budget forecast while private investment continues its gradual recovery. The ACT continues to experience a low level of unemployment and a high participation rate in the labour market.

The budget review has limited new initiatives and responds mostly to supporting the continuation of important initiatives and to the pressures faced in the public school system. This includes additional funding to support local school budgets to meet the learning needs of students. This will provide time for the ACT government to be informed by the recently established ACT Public School System Resourcing Review in considering the resourcing needs and financial sustainability of the ACT public education system in the 2026-27 budget.

The government's focus has been on ensuring the continued delivery of high-quality services that improve the wellbeing of all Canberrans without resorting to the approach of blind and indiscriminate cuts. The government's approach is practical and sensible. We are continuing the multi-year task of achieving \$282 million in savings across government as announced in the budget last year. This, and our broader fiscal strategy, has allowed us to make the investments in the 2025-26 budget to support our public health system, including the record \$1.19 billion of additional investment to respond to healthcare demand and cost pressures, a pressure that is faced by other states and territories.

Last Friday, all states and territories agreed to a new five-year National Health Reform Agreement with the commonwealth government. This new deal will see the ACT receive \$4.1 billion over five years in commonwealth funding, including \$557 million in additional public hospital funding. This is a significant uplift in the commonwealth contribution to our hospitals, which will now be at an estimated 37 per cent in the 2026-27 financial year. We welcome the significant contribution this makes that sees the commonwealth responding to the rising costs and demand in our public health system that the ACT government has already been responding to with increased investment.

This new funding deal includes further funding of \$75 million in 2026-27 which recognises the cost that smaller jurisdictions face in delivering health services compared to our larger counterparts. We will work with the commonwealth to ensure more permanent arrangements to address this issue are implemented. This reflects the joint priorities of the Barr Labor government and the Albanese Labor government in supporting Canberrans to get the quality health care that they expect in their time of need. The full financial impact of the agreement is not reflected in the budget review figures and will be updated in the 2026-27 ACT budget.

General government sector revenue is now estimated to be \$8.9 billion in 2025-26, \$20.5 million lower than the 2025-26 budget. Revenue is expected to be \$295 million higher over the four years to 2028-29. The changes reflect the amended approach to the health levy and payroll tax settings following the budget, changes to investment

earnings, and commonwealth grants and the GST. The territory will benefit from an increase in cross border health revenue from New South Wales, thanks in part to the ongoing advocacy of the health minister with her New South Wales counterparts. The ACT remains a relatively low-taxing jurisdiction and the tax burden per capita is one of the lowest in the country relative to median household income. The ACT's own-source revenue as a share of Gross State Product was the third lowest among all Australian states and territories in 2023-24, at 4.7 per cent. This is a decrease from the previous financial year and in line with the ACT 10-year average.

Mr Speaker, this is a practical, sensible fiscal update that shows the government is doing exactly what we said we would do—delivering on a path back to balance without drastic cuts to public services while delivering the infrastructure our community expects. Because of the actions the government has taken, the budget review is not presented with a further appropriation request from the Assembly, as government expenditure is tracking within three quarters of a percentage point variation of our forecast at budget. This is while managing the usual unexpected impacts that the government faces every year.

This budget update shows that we are making significant progress. After the important efforts taken to support the community through a once in a generation pandemic, the inflationary period that followed and while we continued to invest in the generational infrastructure that will support the future growth of our city, we have avoided austerity and instead invested in our community. This has come at a cost, but we have set out a clear and focused fiscal strategy and pathway to sustainability and we are delivering against it. Mr Speaker, this budget review shows stable, sensible and responsible fiscal management while we continue to deliver for the Canberra community. I commend this update to the Assembly.

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

Annual Reports (Government Agencies) Act, pursuant to section 13—Annual Report 2024-2025—Environment Planning and Sustainable Development Directorate—Corrigendum, dated February 2026.

Credit Rating Stabilisation Plan—Assembly resolution of 18 September 2025—Government response, dated February 2026.

Financial Management Act, pursuant to section 30E—Half-yearly performance reports—December 2025—

ACT Local Hospitals Network, dated February 2026.

Canberra Health Services, dated February 2026.

Chief Minister, Treasurer and Economic Development Directorate, dated February 2026.

City and Environment Directorate, dated February 2026.

Digital Canberra, dated February 2026.

Education Directorate, dated February 2026.

Health and Community Services Directorate, dated February 2026.

Housing ACT, dated February 2026.

Infrastructure Canberra, dated February 2026.

Justice and Community Safety Directorate, dated February 2026.

Transport Canberra Operations, dated February 2026.

Government Procurement Act, pursuant to subsection 31 (4)—Government Procurement Board—Terms of Reference and Strategic Direction, including a ministerial direction letter, dated 2 December 2025.

Light Rail Stages 2A—Business Engagement Report—October to December 2025, dated 5 February 2026.

Planning Act, pursuant to subsection 268(2)—Statement of Leases Granted—1 October to 31 December 2025, dated February 2026.

Tuggeranong Ice Sports Facility development—Quarterly Report, undated.

Territory Records (Executive Records) Amendment Bill 2025

Debate resumed from 26 June 2025, on motion by **Mr Braddock**:

That this bill be agreed to in principle.

MR COCKS (Murrumbidgee) (3.17): I rise today to speak in support of the Territory Records (Executive Records) Amendment Bill 2025. This bill is about something very simple, but something very important. Transparency. Transparency, accountability and respect for the public's right to understand how decisions are made in this place. At its core, this bill says that when executive records become accessible, when cabinet documents pass that 10-year threshold, the government should deal with requests for access in a timely, transparent and accountable way. And if it does not, there should be a clear independent avenue of review.

This is simply basic and good governance. For too long, the current system has relied on vague timelines and internal review processes that do not inspire confidence. Requests for access to executive records can drift on for months. Decisions can be delayed without consequence and when access is refused the review process remains inside the same bureaucracy that made the original call. This bill does fix that. It introduces a clear statutory timeframe, 30 working days for decisions on access. It allows sensible flexibility where requests are genuinely complex or voluminous. And crucially, it replaces internal reviews with independent oversight by the ACT Ombudsman.

That matters because transparency only works if people trust the process, and independence is what builds that trust. This bill strikes a careful balance. It strengthens access to information while still respecting cabinet confidentiality, personal privacy and the need for frank and fearless advice. It does not throw the doors open recklessly. It does not undermine the executive. What it does is ensure that decisions to withhold the information are made properly, reviewed independently and explained clearly.

I also welcome the deemed decision mechanism in this bill. What that means in plain terms is that if the government does not make a decision within the time the law requires they can no longer just sit on a request. The law treats that silence as a decision to refuse access which then automatically gives the applicant the right to seek an independent review. Now that matters because it puts an end to delay by default. It means inaction has consequences and it creates a real incentive for the government to deal with requests

properly and on time. It ensures that people are not left in limbo, waiting for an answer that never comes. This is exactly the kind of quiet, practical reform that improves public confidence in government.

The Canberra Liberals have long argued that sunlight is a disinfectant. Transparency does not weaken democracy, it strengthens it. It improves decision making, it improves trust and it improves outcomes for the community. This bill also sensibly aligns the executive records framework more closely with the freedom of information regime. That consistency makes the system easier to understand, easier to administer and easier for the public to navigate. Madam Assistant Speaker, there is always more that can be done when it comes to transparency. This bill is a meaningful step forward. It improves timeliness, it strengthens oversight and it sends a clear message that access to information is not an afterthought, it is a core democratic principle. For those reasons the Canberra Liberals are pleased to support this bill.

MS STEPHEN-SMITH (Kurrajong—Minister for Health, Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Finance and Minister for the Public Service) (3.22): The ACT government has a commitment to transparency and a track record of improving the public’s right to access government information. This commitment is clearly established by the Open Access Information Scheme. Under the Open Access Information Scheme, pro-disclosure initiatives such as the Open Access website and the Open Data website, both available through the ACT Government Transparency Portal, have enabled greater access for our community to government information, ensuring Canberrans are informed participants in government decision making.

Part 3A of the Territory Records Act 2002, which provides for release of accessible executive records—effectively, cabinet documents that are 10 years old—is an important component of the legislative framework supporting transparency about government decision making in the ACT. Part 3A is a well-used pathway to access accessible executive records, with hundreds of records, made up of cabinet submissions and associated documents, available to be requested each year and published for open access through the ACT Memory database.

The program is not without its challenges, however. Historical files need to be retrieved from archives and converted from physical paper files to electronic documents. Records need to be reviewed against criteria established in the act to consider the public safety and privacy implications of releasing documents, and these records can be lengthy and complex. In each of the last four years, all accessible executive records have been requested, requiring up to 500 files per year to be processed in this way each year.

This volume of work has unfortunately meant that the timeframes for responding to applications has been lengthy in many cases. Opportunities for efficiency in administering part 3A continue to be explored to improve these timeframes. The Chief Minister, Treasury and Economic Development Directorate has also made concerted efforts to expedite processing of the backlog of applications. I am very pleased to advise the Assembly—as I have indicated to Mr Braddock in our discussions—that we expect most, if not all, current applications to have been decided in the next few weeks and months.

The government supports the intent of Mr Braddock’s bill and I want to thank him for

bringing it to the Assembly. The amendments I have circulated today, and will move later in the detail stage, are targeted to support operationalisation of the bill and recognise that in certain circumstances additional time may be required to support considered and diligent decision making under part 3A. The government amendments enable the principal officer deciding a request for access to extend the time for decision under certain circumstances. In its original form, the bill provides no scope for extension of decision-making time at the discretion of the principal officer.

The amendments to this bill set out the circumstances where an extension of time is justified. That could be that agreement has been sought and reached with the person making the request, via application to the ACT Ombudsman, or because a request involves dealing with a large volume of information. Although it is not proposed for inclusion in the legislation, the government commits to reporting on the use of these provisions to support confidence in their appropriate use.

The proposed amendments also increase the time allowed for review by the ombudsman from 15 to 30 working days, in line with feedback from the ombudsman, and confirm that the time allowed for ombudsman review does not commence until the ombudsman is given access to the relevant accessible executive record. The amendments also enable the ombudsman to extend their review period by not more than 30 working days where a request involves large volumes of information, is complex, or an extension is otherwise reasonable in the circumstances.

To support informed decision making, the government amendments enable the ombudsman to seek additional information from the applicant or the principal officer that is reasonably necessary to support a decision. The time allowed for ombudsman review will effectively be paused while the additional information is provided. The proposed amendments allow the ombudsman to refuse to deal with an application if the required information is not received within the stated time. However, while the ombudsman may refuse to deal with an application on this basis, this proposed clause does not restrict or constrain the ombudsman's power to continue dealing with or otherwise making decisions regarding an application.

The government amendments appropriately provide for a transition period in 2026 to ensure the government and the ACT Ombudsman have time to prepare for the range of new obligations and powers that will be included in the legislation. Principal officers deciding requests for access made between the commencement of the amendments and 1 July 2026 will be required to make a decision within 30 days or within an extended timeframe under proposed new section 60 of the legislation. Failure by a principal officer to make a decision on an application within the relevant timeframe will be a deemed decision to fully constrain the document. An applicant will still be able to apply for an internal review of a determination and apply to the ACAT for review.

All other amendments, including the new functions provided by the ombudsman, would take effect from 1 July 2026 if the amendments are supported. Requests for access to accessible executive records made before the commencement day will continue to be governed under the existing provisions of part 3A. This provides clarity for applicants and government officials administering the Territory Records Act at present. The government amendments developed through this process appropriately balance efficient administration of part 3A while providing for diligent, considered and

informed decision making and review by principal officers and the ombudsman.

The government amendments that have been circulated, and will be moved in the detail stage, support the intent of the bill and enable operational implementation. Again, I would like to thank Mr Braddock and his office for their collaborative approach to this bill and assisting us as we developed the government amendments. We appreciate the opportunity to further strengthen our transparency mechanisms. I commend the bill, along with the amendments that the government will be moving, to the Legislative Assembly. Finally, I thank the scrutiny committee and others in the Assembly who have considered this bill along the way.

MR BRADDOCK (Yerrabi) (3.28), in reply: Canberrans can look forward to this coming Canberra Day just being a little bit different. This bill being agreed today will deliver a small but real and practical change in how executive records are accessed. I am pleased to say to historians, journalists, researchers and interested members of the public that an average waiting time of 321 days for access to cabinet documents should no longer be acceptable or expected. That delay came to light through a question on notice I asked last year and it sparked a very simple question. How can documents that are meant to be publicly accessible take nearly a year to be part of the public record? As the Chief Minister acknowledged at the time, there is currently no legislated timeframe for responding to these requests, and it is precisely that absence which this bill seeks to address.

Ironically at the moment, for all practical purposes, accessible executive records are often inaccessible for an extended period of time. These records, commonly referred to as cabinet documents, are more than 10 years old and formally identified as accessible on a list published each Canberra Day. Yet the reality for anyone seeking to consult them is that they must effectively plan their research almost a year in advance. That it is not a minor administrative inconvenience. It is a structural barrier and a transparency conundrum. The current system as it stands directly disadvantages the average person who wishes to research government decision making in a timely and meaningful way. It necessitates overly broad requests through discouraging targeted inquiry and undermines the very purpose of releasing these records in the first place.

Timeliness is central to matters of transparency. When information arrives too late to inform public debate, to contribute to scholarship, or to shed light on policy decisions with contemporary relevance, the democratic value of access is diminished. That is the problem this bill is designed to solve.

My bill legislates a statutory timeframe for the processing of requests for accessible executive records and sets a new mechanism for appealing decisions concerning access to executive records under the Territory Records Act 2002. The first key reform is the introduction of a defined timeframe. Given that these documents have already passed a ten-year release threshold, it appears entirely reasonable for the principal officer to be required to respond to requests within 30 working days.

Importantly, this bill allows for extensions in appropriate circumstances; where agreed to by the requester, where approved by the ACT Ombudsman, or where Christmas shutdown days apply. We will talk further in the detail stage about the government amendments which include a further time extension method. This ensures flexibility for

genuinely complex or resource-intensive requests without allowing delay to become the default.

The second major reform in this bill concerns appeals. At present, decisions to withhold or redact executive records are reviewed internally, raising both actual and perceived concerns about independence. This bill aligns the appeals process with established Freedom of Information Act standards by transferring review functions to the ACT Ombudsman.

If a principal officer fails to make a decision within the legislated timeframe, a deemed release restraint decision is taken to have been made. This is a necessary procedural mechanism, protecting public interest matters so as not to prejudice any information that should genuinely require redaction. Under the bill, decisions to restrain access, whether actual or deemed, may be reviewed by the ACT Ombudsman, an independent statutory officeholder outside the government.

The ombudsman is empowered to assess whether documents have been properly withheld or redacted. Appeals from those reviews may still be made to ACAT. This replaces the current internal review model with one that is genuinely independent, transparent and credible. It also tackles the perception that decisions are being reviewed within the same institutional culture in which they were made, for instance, within the Chief Minister's directorate.

The positive outcomes of these reforms should be clear. If requesters have confidence that their applications will be dealt with promptly, they are far more likely to be precise and targeted in their requests. I was extremely pleased when briefing one major stakeholder yesterday when they stated that the changes in this bill removed the strategic driver for submitting blanket requests, and instead, they will utilise specific, targeted requests going forward. That benefits everyone: the public, the media, researchers and the public service itself.

More broadly, cabinet records are crucial to understanding how decisions are made. They allow us to learn from past successes and failures and to improve policy-making over time. Many of the challenges Canberra faces today; housing, transport and gambling policy, are not new. We make better decisions when we are better informed about how previous governments approached them. Accessible executive records should be accessible in practice, not just name.

I would like to thank the scrutiny committee for their thoughtful and thorough consideration of the bill. I also appreciate Minister Rachel Stephen-Smith and her office for their positive and constructive engagement on the bill and the drafting of amendments. I would like to thank Tim Liersch in my office for pitching the original idea and drafting the original bill and explanatory statement. I would also like to thank Sylvie Robin for capitalising on Tim's good work and bringing it home.

In closing, I would like to thank members for their engagement with this bill and for the support expressed during this debate. This bill strengthens transparency, respects public interest protections and aligns our record-keeping regime with contemporary democratic expectations. It may be small work that will go un-noticed by the majority of Canberrans, but it is still important to transparency and the functioning of our

democracy. I commend the bill to the Assembly and thank members for their support.

Bill agreed to in principle.

Detail stage

Bill, by leave, taken as a whole.

MS STEPHEN-SMITH (Kurrajong—Minister for Health, Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Finance and Minister for the Public Service) (3.35), by leave: I move amendments Nos 1 to 13 circulated in my name together [*see schedule 1 at page 369*] and table a supplementary explanatory statement.

I will not speak for long, because I have already touched, in my speech during the in-principle stage, on what these amendments seek to achieve. I want to again indicate my thanks to Mr Braddock and his office, and to the scrutiny committee. I hope that the explanatory statement that has been tabled, along with the amendments circulated, will cover off on questions that people might have about the intent, the potential human rights impact and the next steps.

As I indicated in my speech during the in-principle stage, while there is nothing in the legislation that requires the government to report on the use of these extensions and the way that this act is being implemented, we have committed, including through the explanatory statement, to undertaking that reporting through separate mechanisms, including, most likely, through the annual report directions for the Chief Minister, Treasury and Economic Development Directorate.

I commend the amendments to the Assembly.

MR BRADDOCK (Yerrabi) (3.37): I rise in support of the government's amendments to this bill, as well as the clarification provided in the updated explanatory statement, which, together, ensure that the legislation will operate effectively and as intended.

The amendments appropriately tidy up a number of smaller provisions, reflecting a practical understanding of public service operations and the budgetary arrangements as they apply to the ACT Ombudsman. In particular, I acknowledge the implications that this bill has for funding and resourcing, and I support the transitional arrangements that see the Ombudsman's new functions commence in July 2026. That transitional period allows adequate time for the usual budget allocation processes to occur and to support a sustainable implementation.

I support the approach that the minister's office has articulated in the amended explanatory statement, that "any additional reporting arrangements will be considered separately from these amendments". I thank the minister for her public commitments provided during this debate on the reporting on the use of the principal officer extensions to ensure their proper use throughout the operationalisation of this bill, and I appreciate her support in doing so.

The Greens support further consideration, following a period of practical implementation, of whether further amendments to this reporting mechanism are

required. I would like to acknowledge the cooperative approach taken throughout this process, and I thank the Assembly, and I note the constructive engagement from Minister Rachel Stephen-Smith in the crafting of these amendments. Ultimately, this bill, inclusive of the proposed amendments, supports the timely release of executive records and represents a positive step towards greater transparency and accountability in our democracy.

Amendments agreed to.

Bill, as a whole, as amended, agreed to.

Bill, as amended, agreed to.

Housing—supply

MS MORRIS (Brindabella) (3.39): I move:

That this Assembly:

- (1) notes that:
 - (a) in July 2024 the Government committed to completing 30,000 additional dwellings by 2030;
 - (b) meeting this target requires the completion of 1,250 new dwellings each quarter;
 - (c) Australian Bureau of Statistics data shows:
 - (i) the ACT is already more than 1,100 completions behind what is required to meet the target;
 - (ii) despite an increase in completions in the latest quarter, the ACT has completed 30 percent fewer dwellings in the 12 months to September 2025 than were completed in the 12 months to December 2020;
 - (iii) dwelling commencements show a similar shortfall; and
 - (iv) dwelling approvals for the 12 months to November 2025 are less than 4,000, and in the 12 months to September 2025 dwelling approvals are less than 50 percent of what was approved in the 12 months to December 2018; and
 - (d) the ACT is in a housing crisis, with many Canberrans feeling owning their own home is out of reach;
- (2) further notes the importance of home ownership to:
 - (a) financial security in retirement;
 - (b) the decision and ability to have and raise children; and
 - (c) stable, long-term housing security; and
- (3) calls on the Government to:
 - (a) take immediate action to increase the number of dwelling commencements in the ACT;
 - (b) commence quarterly reporting on progress toward delivering 30,000

homes by 2030, including:

- (i) the number of homes completed in the year to date; and
 - (ii) the completion rate required to reach 30,000 by 2030 and any shortfall; and
- (c) report back to the Assembly in the next sitting week on what actions have been taken to increase the number of dwelling commencements in the ACT.

Helping Canberrans to realise their dream of owning their own home is a social, economic and moral imperative. That is because housing is a fundamental ingredient to the wellbeing, happiness and stability of individuals, families and communities. At all stages of one's life, home ownership leads to both financial and emotional stability and security. It provides the foundation for children and families to flourish and, when Canberra families flourish, Canberra flourishes.

That is why I worry when, all too often, I hear Canberrans talking about what seems, to them, to be a hopeless aspiration—to one day own their own home. Many young Canberrans feel that owning a home will never be in reach for them. Some have told me that they will leave Canberra to buy a home, because they believe it is simply impossible to buy one here, even when they have substantial savings and a reasonable income. Others have given up hope, believing purchasing a home is just an insurmountable pipe dream.

I see a generation of young people who are preparing to leave school and make their way in a world where they see very little hope for their future. Just last week, the shadow minister for youth, Ed Cocks, and I met with a very impressive young man entering year 11. He shared with us the sense of hopelessness that he and many of his peers experience when they look to the future. They fear that, among other things, they will not be able to buy their own home one day.

Sadly, many of the parents and grandparents of such young people are starting to agree. They fear that their kids may never be able to buy a home of their own and enjoy the security that comes with it. How could this be, in such a wealthy, prosperous jurisdiction, in such a wealthy, prosperous nation? How can the Australian dream of owning your own home be dying?

We must revive the dream of owning your own home, so that all aspirational Canberrans can be provided with a stable and secure dwelling place, where they can raise their family and be anchored in their community. The Liberals recognise that it is our moral duty to empower people to own their own home, not just for their own welfare but for the good of society.

While renting is an extremely important component of housing, it does not offer the same emotional and financial security that home ownership does. As an experienced renter myself, I know that firsthand. Renters are always faced with the destabilising effects of leases, landlords, short-term living and uncertainty about the future. By contrast, home ownership provides security and a degree of freedom that renters do not have. A home of your own is something that you can shape and change to fit your way of life and reflect your personality. If there is a garden, trees and shrubs are planted,

and we see them grow, and provide shade and privacy.

The benefits of a sense of place, your own place, are wide and deep. Your home is a place where, over the years and decades, memories are made. As the years pass, a family may grow and want to move to a home that is larger or better situated for a family's needs. Owning your own home provides an asset that helps you to make that move possible. In the long term, when the children have grown up and left home, and mum and dad have retired, a home of their own will be a key factor in their emotional and financial wellbeing.

According to the Association of Superannuation Funds of Australia, over a 30-year retirement, renters will pay over \$435,000 more than retirees who own their own home. Home ownership and superannuation are key factors in determining whether Canberrans will retire comfortably. The shortfall in affordable housing that meets the wants and needs of Canberrans has a profound cost at every stage of life. This cost is reflected in the booming housing market over the border, fed in considerable part by Canberrans—very often Canberra families who are moving to New South Wales for a block of land and a house that they cannot afford to buy here in the ACT.

The developments just across the border, in Jerrabomberra, Googong, and now South Jerrabomberra and Jumping Creek, reflect this demand, as do developments further afield in Bungendore and Murrumbateman. These former Canberrans continue to work in Canberra, but they pay their rates and taxes in New South Wales. Our inability to meet the ACT's demand for housing has financial implications for the territory.

This motion does not pretend to fix Labor's housing crisis in one go, but it intends to bring to light an area of utmost significance to the future of Canberra. This motion states the bare facts on the size of the problem, and it calls on the government to improve the flow of information on housing supply in Canberra, and on the government's policy response.

Canberra is growing quickly. By 2050, Canberra is expected to have around 700,000 people. At the last election, the Canberra Liberals recognised our city would need to build 125,000 new homes to house our growing population. ACT Labor committed to delivering 30,000 homes by 2030, and it is a start, but they are already failing and falling behind.

To achieve this target, the ACT government needs to see the completion of roughly 1,250 homes per quarter, and data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics shows that the ACT is already more than 1,000 homes behind. This is not a small bump; it is a big deficit which will only get bigger.

Despite a recent uptick in the latest quarter, the ACT has completed fewer homes in the 12 months to September last year than in the 12 months to December five years ago. New home commencements show a similar shortfall, and new home approvals in the 12 months to September 2025 are less than half of where they were seven years ago. The pipeline is thinning, and that means fewer new homes in the years ahead. In the middle of a housing crisis, we are approving, commencing and completing fewer homes now than we were only a few years ago.

This housing crisis is a social crisis. A home of your own is far more than just a form of accommodation; it is an expression of hope and aspiration for the future. I trust that everyone in this Assembly agrees.

MR STEEL (Murrumbidgee—Treasurer, Minister for Planning and Sustainable Development, Minister for Heritage and Minister for Transport) (3.48): I thank Ms Morris for bringing this motion to the Assembly. ACT Labor made its plan for housing in Canberra a centrepiece of the 2024 election. We started taking action to deliver on our commitment to enable 30,000 new homes on day one of this term, and we will keep taking action throughout this term to ensure that Canberra remains livable and connected for residents.

The ACT government is a signatory to the National Housing Accord and, of course, the target set by the commonwealth government of 1.2 million new, well-located homes across the country. The ACT's population share of that 1.2 million homes is 21,000 homes—21,057 homes, to be exact. The ACT government is not directly responsible for building all those homes; but, of course, it is directly responsible for funding 175 dwellings by 2028-29. The commonwealth government is also responsible for the delivery of a further 175 affordable homes under the agreement.

The ACT government's \$100 million Affordable Housing Project Fund is the mechanism being used to finance the delivery of the ACT's 175 dwellings. So far, more than 800 affordable dwellings have been supported through the AHPF, with construction on many of them kicking off this year.

Whilst there are no annual or quarterly targets, the National Housing Accord requires that, on average, 1,053 homes need to be built each quarter, or 4,211 homes annually, to meet the national housing target for the ACT. In the five quarters since the National Housing Accord commenced, the ACT outperformed all other jurisdictions in terms of new dwelling completions.

Since June 2024, in the ACT, 5,134 new homes were completed, a shortfall of just 130 new homes, or two per cent, compared to the rolling implied quarterly target, noting completions are expected to fluctuate based on a range of factors. The ACT's dwelling completion rate of two per cent below the target is significantly higher than the national completion rate of 26 per cent below the target.

Backed up by a strong pipeline of approved unit dwelling approvals, the most recent data came out over the last week from the ABS Building Approvals, Australia dataset, which shows that 4,353 dwelling units were approved to December 2025, throughout the year, which is a near doubling of the figure for that period in the previous year.

We are making strong progress. Of course, there is strong planning reform underway to support the further pipeline of new homes, which will help to meet both the national housing target and our broader commitment to enable 30,000 new homes by 2025.

This commitment, while ambitious, is essential to accommodate our rapidly growing community, and it will be achieved through collaboration between the ACT and commonwealth governments, the community housing sector and partnerships with the private sector.

We will meet our commitment through a holistic, strategic, commonsense approach. This includes new land releases, including the Suburban Land Agency's delivery of new suburbs, the development of urban renewal sites through the Suburban Land Agency and the City Renewal Authority, public, social and affordable homes being delivered with direct ACT government support, and privately let opportunities enabled by reforms like the missing middle housing reforms and zoning uplift, particularly through low-rise, medium-density housing in existing urban areas.

As the Assembly will recall, last year the ACT government consulted on the draft missing middle housing design guide and draft major plan amendment. Of course, the draft plan amendment is currently before the standing committee, and we respect that they are undertaking their inquiry. The missing middle reforms will unlock more land for development within our existing suburbs, ensuring that these new homes are well designed, well placed and connected to the amenities that make Canberra a great place to live.

The government is also completing further planning work to consider how we can streamline the approval processes for missing middle development. This year, we will develop a Canberra house pattern book, a process that will enable pre-approved missing middle housing designs. We have seen the benefit of those across the border in New South Wales, where pattern books can reduce the complexity, time and cost of the design and approval process, and support Canberrans to develop new housing on suitable blocks in well-located areas. I am very much looking forward to having more to say on the missing middle pattern book, and the opportunity that it presents for our local design professionals.

The government recognises that Canberrans move around our city in different ways, so housing needs to have diverse transport options—infrastructure to support the new homes that we want to build. To this end, we are planning for greater housing choice and higher density around rapid transit stops and corridors, which is known as transport-oriented development. This will support a compact and sustainable city and reduce car dependence in the long term.

Importantly, transit stops located or close to existing shopping centres are important areas for increased housing. The government is exploring opportunities for increased density within the walkable catchments of strategically located centres, close to existing and planned light rail routes and rapid bus routes.

This includes the northern gateway area, located along the existing light rail corridor in the inner north district, and the work that is being undertaken on the southern gateway area, located along the proposed city to Woden light rail corridor, and on Athllon Drive, down to Beasley Street in Torrens and Farrer, where there is an existing rapid bus corridor. Shop-top and shop-adjacent housing will enable residents to live, work and play within walking distance of jobs, services and places of community connection, thereby creating a better-connected, accessible and sustainable city.

The Labor Party believes that access to housing is not just an economic priority, but a moral imperative. We are engaging in this challenge with the seriousness and urgency that it deserves. Building more public homes is a necessity to support our city's most

vulnerable people. To address this, last year I, along with the minister for homes and homelessness, began to streamline the approval process under the Planning Act for territory priority projects for public housing, speeding up the delivery of homes for those who need them most. We thank the Assembly for their support for the inclusion of community housing in that.

We have a raft of measures in development to support the construction industry that will deliver more homes for Canberrans. We are developing appropriate trade licensing models, assessment pathways and transition arrangements, while exploring incentives to boost trade completion and retain skills. A significant investment was made in the budget in increasing training subsidies. Informed by other jurisdictions and the Productivity Commission's work, we will continue to consult with industry before progressing further legislative reform.

All these measures are showing results, and I will be happy to keep the Assembly updated in line with this motion. I thank members for their engagement on this. The six-month cadence is in alignment with some of our reporting requirements around the National Housing Accord, for example, so that will provide an opportunity for us to track progress as we continue to work to support more homes in the territory, and more housing supply.

Canberra has a unique urban character, and we achieve that through connected and well-thought-out planning. Each new planning initiative and commitment is made in consideration of the needs and desires of ACT residents. While we build towards our target of 30,000 new homes by 2030, we are continuing to deliver and provide the best housing supply, access and choice.

This motion describes ACT Labor's policy that we took to the election, and we are proud of it. We are already working on and implementing these policies, and we are continuing to look at opportunities to achieve the target. It has been transformational. It has literally been printed and put up on the wall of the Dickson office block of the City and Environment Directorate. It is a clear vision that the government has set out to officials that we want to achieve. That is important for building a culture of support for more homes. We are looking at each element of the planning and building systems to be able to support that, whilst at the same time not sacrificing building quality, so that when these homes are built they are livable and they are not subject to significant defects.

The only thing I would negatively comment on in relation to this motion is in relation to the part regarding people leaving the ACT to live in New South Wales. The ACT has had very strong net interstate migration. In fact, we have had a long-running discussion—put it that way—with the commonwealth government, particularly with the Australian Bureau of Statistics, as well as the Commonwealth Grants Commission, about the undercount of the ACT's population, which is actually about an undercount of the net interstate migration figures.

We have very strong net interstate migration. People want to come and live here. That is shown in the figures, and I refer members to those figures. The long-running average shows that we have had very strong growth there, so I reject the characterisation that people are fleeing the territory. The reason people want to live here is because of our

great quality of life. But we do need to supply more homes, to provide opportunities for people living here, and we have a comprehensive plan to do that, which we set out at the election.

We will also continue, through the budget process, to update the community through the Housing Supply and Land Release Program. That was recently updated from the old Indicative Land Release Program, because we recognised that, as land becomes scarcer in the territory and the city reaches the edges of nature reserves, we need to make sure that there are further opportunities to support housing supply in the existing urban footprint.

This is consistent with the 2018 Planning Strategy, where we outlined that 70 per cent of future development would occur within the existing urban footprint and only 30 per cent would occur in greenfield areas. That is why we have broadened out the HSLRP. That is consistent with the government and the Labor Party's commitment of enabling 30,000 new homes.

This is about enabling new homes on existing leased blocks, leased land, not just the release of government land, which is what we only reported on under the previous arrangement. It also means the direct delivery, funding, of community, affordable and public housing projects, which the ACT government has engaged in and has set separate targets on, which are recognised in this motion. We will continue to report against those measures.

I also want to recognise that today, as we debate this motion, through the budget review, we have also outlined the initiative to provide an LVC reduction of up to \$250,000 per dwelling to support community housing projects by community housing providers, which is another measure that we are taking to support the provision of community housing in the territory. This is no doubt a discussion that we will continue to have, and we are happy to have it.

I thank Ms Morris for bringing this forward for discussion, and I look forward to providing the updates that are called for in the motion, together with the Minister for Homes, Homelessness and New Suburbs.

MS CLAY (Ginninderra) (4.01), by leave: I move:

1. Insert after paragraph (1)(d):

- “(e) revenue surrendered to NSW councils and government when ACT residents buy across the border; and
- (f) as part of Labor's housing plan to deliver 30,000 dwellings, 5,000 affordable, community and public housing dwellings will be delivered, with the public housing portfolio growing to 13,2000 dwellings by 2030.”.

2. Omit paragraph (3), substitute:

“(3) calls on the ACT Government to:

- (a) take immediate action to increase the number of dwelling commencements in the ACT;
- (b) every six months publicly report on progress toward delivering 30,000

homes by 2030, including:

- (i) the number of homes completed in the year to date;
- (ii) the completion rate required to reach 30,000 by 2030 and any shortfall;
- (iii) the number of development applications submitted and approved;
- (iv) the number of:
 - (A) affordable;
 - (B) community; and
 - (C) public housing dwellings that have been released;
- (c) any other additional information that allows transparency over delivery of the 5,000 affordable, community and public housing dwellings;
- (d) report back to the Assembly, in the next sitting week, on what actions have been taken to increase the number of dwelling commencements in the ACT.”.

I would like to commend Ms Morris for bringing forward this motion. I think it is a really important motion for transparency and to make sure that we can all track performance against the government target. I would also like to thank the offices of Minister Berry and Minister Steel for the positive way that they have helped brief us and we have worked together on the amendments that I have brought forward, and Ms Carrick for engagement too, and also the Clerk. I think what we have here is a bit of a group drafting effort. It is my amendment and I have signed it, but you know, if this was a bit of a group work assignment—nobody is exactly 100 per cent happy with it, so we must have landed it. We must have done the right thing.

Every Canberran deserves a safe, secure and affordable place to call home, yet we know the reality for far too many people is quite different. The ACT Greens have long been champions for stronger action on housing. At the last election we took an ambitious public housing target to the people, and we have continued to support the efforts of ACT Labor to grow our public housing stock. These steps matter. Some years ago, I understand that public housing made up 13 per cent of the total housing stock. As at June 2025, our public housing had fallen to 5.6 per cent of public housing stock and I am concerned, based on the anticipated number of dwellings to be built by June 2030 and the government targets, that the proportion of public housing dwellings is set to fall even further.

Every new home built means one less person sleeping rough or couch surfing, but the reality is that while we are building more homes, the number of people waiting for public housing keeps rising. That wait list has become a symbol of the challenges we face. It is clear that ACT Labor has not yet managed to deliver a plan that will actually decrease these wait times. We have seen that rise from around 3,000 at the start of this term to around 3,500 households on that wait list the last time I got an update.

For years, the government found it difficult to meet its own targets for public community and affordable housing, particularly on land that the government itself releases. It is a problem we must address head on. Not only do we need more homes, but we need to ensure that those homes are available to the people who need them most.

We also have some barriers in our current planning system. Right now, when existing blocks are redeveloped, there is no requirement for developers to include public, community or affordable housing. That is known as inclusionary zoning, and it is a missed opportunity. It is one that means we are not taking full advantage of the growth and change happening across Canberra to support those doing it toughest.

That is why the ACT Greens made a strong commitment at the last election to progress work on inclusionary zoning. Inclusionary zoning is a proven tool used in cities around the world to require a certain proportion of new development to be set aside for community and public housing. It is encouraging to see that the minister for planning has recognised the importance of this approach in his recent Statement of Planning Priorities and I know that it is also a goal that is supported in the Canberra Liberals' policies. So we are very much looking forward to seeing that policy delivered on in this term.

In the coming weeks, the ACT Greens will be releasing an issues paper on inclusionary zoning. Our aim is to spark debate and contribute to the government work on this, making sure that we are getting the right design of scheme here in Canberra and that we are getting enough views into how we design that so that as our city grows, we are building a future where everyone has a place to live and thrive and where people can see where that place is for themselves in the future. I think hope in the future, not false hope, but genuine hope that things are getting better is really, really important at the moment.

Inclusionary zoning is the plan which will be used by governments to require a percentage of new residential developments to be set aside for that social housing. It means that as new homes are built, a portion is guaranteed to go to those who would otherwise be locked out of that private rental market. It is practical, fair and effective and it makes sure that the benefits of development are shared by all members of our community, not just a select few.

The amendments that I have circulated have really added a bit of detail to Ms Morris' original motion. We are making sure we are also tracking, separately, the public homes that we are having, the community homes and the affordable homes, so that we have full transparency over those and to make sure we are getting full transparency over our 5,000 affordable community and public housing dwelling targets by 2030 and the growth of the public housing portfolio to 13,200 by 2030. I think extra transparency is always useful and it will assist all of us, I think, to be able to see exactly how we are tracking from one year to the next and how hard we will have to work on our goals in coming years to make sure that we meet them.

MS BARRY (Ginninderra) (4.06): I too rise to speak in support of Ms Morris' motion. I commend her for bringing this motion to the Assembly. This is a motion that goes to the heart of accountability and whether the government can deliver on the promises it makes to the Canberra community. It will come as no surprise to anyone that in my office I do have a detailed note and we have been doing the numbers. We have examined the projections and the tested assumptions that sit behind the government's claim.

Even on the most optimistic trajectory, you would be surprised to know that annual approvals of around 5,000 dwellings every single year would need to be the

government's target for them to meet that goal of 30,000 homes. That is an 85 per cent completion rate and a two to three year lag between approvals and delivery. That would represent a historic increase on the long-term average of approximately 4,500 dwelling approvals per annum. And, Mr Deputy Speaker, that is before we account for the reality we face today, which is declining applications and falling approval numbers. So it is little surprise that, as the minister acknowledged, the headline goal of 30,000 dwellings by 2030 is already looking shaky. This is becoming a familiar pattern of this Labor government's promises; a big promise at election time, watered down in delivery, and dismissed as merely aspirational when reality intervenes. This is the true value of a Labor election promise.

The reality, like the rest of Australia, is that we face three fundamental housing challenges. First, we are living with the consequence of long-term planning failure and underdevelopment and investment in housing. The government have been slow to release land and have layered developments with excessive bureaucracy, driving costs up and driving delays up as well. Second, we continue to deal with post-COVID supply chain disruptions and the loss of skilled construction workers, which has made building more expensive and delivery timeframes longer. Third, we face significant population growth based on the ABS data and the ACT's own projections. Canberra's population is on track to approach one million people within the working lifetime of today's year 12 students. So we are starting well behind the eight ball.

Limited housing supply has artificially inflated prices and in doing so, it has broken the social contract with young Australians. I too hear from young people who are worried about their ability to own a slice of Australian earth, to be safe and to be comfortable in their own home. The promise is that if you study hard, work hard and play by the rules, you will be rewarded with security and a home of your own. Rather, we are drifting towards a society where housing is only accessible to those who already have wealth. A society of haves and have-nots. This is not the Australian dream. This is not the Australian dream, Mr Deputy Speaker.

When I reflect on my own portfolio responsibilities the failure is even more stark. Public housing growth in this territory has been stagnant. After years of neglect, public housing numbers have only just been restored to 2018 levels, and over the same period, waiting lists have doubled to more than 3,500 households. So while it is welcome that the government has finally acknowledged the scale of the housing crisis and is doing something to address it, I am far from convinced it truly understands the urgency or the breadth of action required today.

Mr Deputy Speaker, we must ask some hard questions. We must start to ask some hard questions. The questions are—30,000 homes by 2030 may be a catchy election slogan, but it is not a housing strategy—even if the targets were met, the problem is, would it actually solve the issues we have today? Would it house everyone who currently needs a home? I understand that the government would not be responsible for building every single home in the ACT. But would it future-proof Canberra for sustained population growth? Would it meaningfully improve housing affordability for families today?

In my view, the honest answer to all of the questions is no. The government must stop treating land sales and planning approvals as cash cows and start treating housing as essential social infrastructure. We need a realistic, credible plan for Canberra, one that

addresses current shortages and prepares for future growth. Planning must be more than arbitrary, numerical targets. It must be about liveability; not just where people will live, but how they will live, where they will work, where they will rest and where they will play.

Canberra was built on the vision of Marion Mahony Griffin and Walter Burley Griffin, a vision grounded in thoughtful, human-centred planning and the belief that this could be a great city in which to live. Many of us have benefited from that legacy, enjoying life in the bush capital. But we are now at a crossroad. We need the same level of ambition, foresight and integrity in planning to meet the challenges of today and tomorrow.

For those reasons, Mr Deputy Speaker, I support Ms Morris' motion. Alongside recent Liberal motions calling for audits, transparency and proper assessment of community and sporting infrastructure, this motion lays the groundwork for a serious conversation ahead of the next election, because at the next election it will come down to two simple questions in my view: what is Canberra's future and who actually has the plan to deliver it? Once again, I thank Ms Morris for this motion and I commend the motion to the Assembly.

MS CARRICK (Murrumbidgee) (4.14): I would like to thank Ms Morris for bringing forward this motion. It is one of the most important responsibilities of government to enable the provision of housing that is affordable and well-connected to transport and services and is climate resilient. Thirty thousand homes by 2030 is an ambitious target and I hope we get there. To have the best chance, it needs better planning and monitoring of the implementation, and this motion goes to the transparency needed.

A key part of that responsibility is making sure we are building the right housing stock. That means prioritising the needs of the community rather than the preferences of investors. It is not just about cramming houses in. There must be a balance with community needs. SQM Research reports a 3 per cent vacancy rate for properties in the 2606 postcode, which includes the Woden town centre. A high vacancy rate like this is not in itself a bad thing, but building many more small, one bedroom apartments that are empty does not help address housing affordability in the longer-term.

We have for some time had a two-speed housing market, with prices of freestanding houses continuing to rise while apartment prices are falling. Having a range of unit sizes and a variety of housing types is therefore important for meeting people's housing needs and improving affordability. As we continue to reform planning rules, we must keep climate resilience as a key consideration. A key challenge is to increase our tree canopy as suburbs densify, to provide relief from heat waves that are becoming more intense and more frequent.

We also need to protect people's privacy and their solar access in their homes. When we build homes from boundary to boundary we need to consider the people around them. We must also provide the public and community housing that people on lower incomes need. Everyone needs a home. They need to be affordable for everyone, particularly our young people. Regular data on how we are tracking towards our housing objectives is necessary if we are to achieve them. I therefore support Ms Morris' motion and the amendments brought forward by Ms Clay.

MR EMERSON (Kurrajong) (4.16): I rise to speak in support of Ms Morris' motion as well, and also welcome Ms Clay's amendments, which I understand have been negotiated together with Ms Carrick and multiple others, adding further detail to the reporting requirements coming out of this motion, with a frequency of six-monthly reporting. That strikes me as a reasonable balance. This motion makes a very sensible ask and it is a positive step toward greater transparency and accountability with regard to a major government commitment.

It is obvious that we have not done anywhere near enough to address the housing crisis across the country, including here in the territory. We need to see more urgent action from both levels of government. One clear example is the vacant CSIRO Ginninderra site. Despite being proposed for redevelopment over a decade ago, this site still has not been touched. It is in an ideal location close to Belconnen, Civic and Gungahlin. The full site has space for up to 8,100 dwellings from the government's own modelling, which is more than a quarter of its commitment to deliver 30,000 new homes by 2030.

So it is disappointing to have learned that the ACT government is settling for just 3,000 homes on this site. I have been trying unsuccessfully to find out if a business case for purchasing and developing this site is still yet to be considered by cabinet. Despite the less ambitious scope for this project, and having Labor governments at both levels, they somehow have not managed to get it over the line after years of conversations and explorations. It is an example demonstrating a lack of urgency, which is exactly what the housing crisis requires from us—urgency.

To address this crisis, of course, we need to ensure we focus on housing supply and also on housing quality. Two weeks ago, during a mobile office at Dickson shops, I was approached by a young couple who had recently purchased their own home in Downer, to learn that less than 10 years after their building was built and four years after they purchased it, they are now stuck paying many thousands of dollars in remediation fees because of major concrete defects in the structure.

I know someone who works in a concrete remediation business, or runs one, in fact, and 90 per cent of their work is brand new builds. Ninety per cent. Unfortunately, these stories are far too common, with a growing number of Canberrans living in homes with significant structural defects. Meanwhile, the government is yet to fulfil its election commitment from 2020 and 2024 to introduce public building certifiers to address what strikes me as perhaps the most obvious conflict of interest possible, that is, the private building certification industry.

We have also seen a lack of urgency with respect to public housing. The latest report on government services data, just out this week or last week, shows that almost 30 per cent of the ACT's public housing stock is considered to be in a condition that is not of an acceptable standard. Almost 30 per cent. That is defined as having no more than two major structural deficits and at least four working facilities, like a shower and a stove. Those are the second-worst figures in the country and it is a five percentage point decrease in the number of public housing dwellings of an acceptable standard since 2023.

We are all hearing—I am sure it is full in everyone else's inboxes, as it is in mine—

about recurring issues in public housing complexes where tenants are not being placed in appropriate housing types or homes are not fit for people with complex support needs, including for people with disability. We saw this, of course, when it was revealed late last year that Housing ACT has never requested any money for specialist disability accommodation from the commonwealth, from the NDIA, despite being registered for the scheme since 2017.

Last year, the minister allowed Housing ACT's SDA registration to lapse because it was not expected to pass a recertification audit, meaning that over an eight-year period the ACT government—and, importantly, our community—missed out on potentially many millions of dollars in commonwealth funding set aside for ensuring housing meets the requirements of people with disability who have high support needs. That is a massive missed opportunity. Almost half of all Canberrans living in public housing have a disability, but the government had not done even the preliminary work, and still has not as far as I know, to determine how many of its public housing tenants are NDIS participants who are eligible for SDA funding, let alone accessing that funding to ensure their homes actually meet their needs.

It is also not enough just to build more dwellings. We need to see the right dwellings being built, and genuine affordability is critical to that. I note section 2 of Ms Morris' motion discussing the important role home ownership plays in medium- and long-term housing solutions. The reality of our broken housing system is that home ownership is an impossible dream for an ever-increasing proportion of Canberrans. We cannot accept that this is an unavoidable reality. It is an entirely avoidable consequence—a consequence of policy settings that, for far too long, have treated home ownership more like a wealth-creation tool than a vehicle for ensuring the human right to housing is upheld. Given, though, that this is indeed the reality, we need to ensure sufficient support is in place for those who are renting in the private market, people in public, social and community housing, and Canberrans who—right now, tonight—are unable to access any form of housing.

With that in mind, I did want to take the opportunity during this debate to welcome the government's announcement today of reduced lease variation charges for community housing providers and developers that include at least 15 per cent social or affordable rentals in their developments. Community housing providers have repeatedly stated to me—and I am sure they are saying the same things to other members in this place—that they are ready to step up and help deliver the homes we need, but they need the right policy settings to make that possible. This announcement today is a welcome step forward in that respect and I thank the minister for homes and new suburbs for making it.

My supply agreement with the government includes a commitment to increase the proportion of public and community housing in the ACT, which has been going backwards for decades. Today's announcement is good. It must move us towards fulfilling that commitment, and I really warmly welcome any further reforms that shift us in that direction with greater urgency, the kind of urgency that Canberrans expect. We need to do everything we can in this place to spur real action to address the territory's housing crisis. So again, I want to thank Ms Morris for bringing forward her motion which, with the support of the Assembly, will lead to increased transparency and accountability around the ACT government's commitments in this area.

MS MORRIS (Brindabella) (4.23): I would like to thank everyone for their contribution to this debate, and for the amendments that were circulated by Ms Clay. I really want to thank Ms Clay and the Greens for their thoughtful consideration and contribution to my motion. There was a lot of very welcome collaboration between my office, Ms Clay's office, Ms Carrick's office and Minister Steel's office. I think we did land in a happy place and I welcome that. I hope that this will lead us to a better outcome for Canberra and for every young Canberran who dreams of owning their own home one day. Thank you, Mr Emerson, for your contribution as well, and Ms Barry, for your contribution.

I believe that everyone in this place understands the importance of increasing housing supply in the ACT as being critical to being able to deliver the homes that we have talked about today. Addressing the problem requires changes to many areas of government policy and administration. Just one example: in its 2025 report on taxation in the housing sector, the Centre for International Economics found that Canberra had a higher total cost for new greenfields house and land packages than any other state capital city, including Sydney. A key driver of this was the cost of developed land, which is largely in the hands of the ACT government. Clearly there is much more work to do, but I think this has been a really positive outcome and I am glad that we could achieve consensus today. So thank you everyone for your contribution to this debate.

Amendment agreed to.

Original question, as amended, resolved in the affirmative.

Papers

Motion to take note of papers

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

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

Justice and Community Safety Legislation Amendment Bill 2025 (No 3)

Debate resumed from 2 December 2025, on motion by **Ms Cheyne**:

That this bill be agreed to in principle.

MS BARRY (Ginninderra) (4.26): Firstly, I would like to acknowledge that regular reviews of legislation are very important. They allow us to identify how laws operate in practice, to understand the challenges that arise on the ground and to make necessary amendments where the law is no longer fit for purpose. They also provide an opportunity for government to reflect honestly on the efficiency and effectiveness of its policy settings.

We know our justice system is under significant pressure. We have heard that through annual reports and budget estimates. Courts and tribunals, police, the DPP, Legal Aid,

the public defenders office and defence lawyers are all saying the same things. Workloads are increasing, matters are becoming more complex, backlogs are growing, and delays in hearings and resolutions are becoming the norm rather than the exception. As we say in law: justice delayed is justice denied. We are seeing exactly that play out. Victims are waiting far too long for justice. Recidivism rates remain a national disgrace and, as a consequence, there is a real risk that confidence in our law enforcement and justice system will continue to erode.

There are no winners here, when a criminal justice system is allowed to run down. I acknowledge that this government's reckless spending history has left it with limited fiscal room to properly address the resourcing pressures facing the legal system. That is precisely why a serious review of court and tribunal process is so important. For example, improvement to procedures and the removal of unnecessary legislative red tape can strengthen the administration of justice without placing additional strain on the budget.

Against that backdrop, Mr Deputy Speaker, I must say that I was underwhelmed by the scope of ambition of the proposal contained in the justice and community safety legislation omnibus bill. I note the government's talking points on several issues in this Assembly conflate reasonable requests for the government to do what it should be doing as an unreasonable additional impost on the budget. This is, unfortunately, the consequence of a government that has been in for far too long.

My party believes that sensible investments that have long-term benefits, and efficiencies, are an important part of the budget repair strategy. While there are some sensible measures in this bill that will make marginal improvements, and we will support those changes, marginal changes are not enough. To the hardworking staff of the Justice and Community Safety Directorate, I say this: the opposition wants to see far more ambitious reform brought forward—reforms that genuinely lift the performance of our courts and tribunals and ensure that the ACT has the most efficient and effective justice system in the country.

Turning to the specific issue in the bill, I note the move to gender-neutral language in the Discrimination Act, specifically changing the term “woman” to “person” in sections relating to pregnancy. While I am satisfied that the change does not affect rights under the legislation, it does diminish the substantial role women play in childbirth. When we have the Minister for Women talking about the protection of women today, it does beg the question: who are we protecting if we cannot list them in legislation?

We need to be more careful in drafting legislation to ensure that important nuance is not lost. I had attempted to find alternative language in this space. Unfortunately, the government legislative drafters were unable to draft the amendments in time for this debate, and the government refused to defer consideration of the parts of this bill to enable more considered debate.

Sadly, this seems to reflect the government's approach to legislative reform that its own ideas must not be questioned, and the legislative process has been brushed aside to achieve its own outcome. As someone who understands the importance of law being developed with due care and consideration, I find this approach very disturbing.

To conclude, Mr Deputy Speaker, we support the principle of regular legislative review, but we call on the government to consider that far more substantial reform is required to address mounting pressures on our legal system. Canberrans deserve a fairer, faster and more cost-effective outcome from our courts and tribunals, and this Assembly must do more to deliver that.

MISS NUTTALL (Brindabella) (4.32): I rise to speak in support of this bill. This bill is, of course, largely made up of a few technical or semantic changes, but there are a few areas I want to particularly speak to, and indeed welcome.

I specifically want to speak in my capacity as the ACT Greens spokesperson for LGBTIQ+ affairs to welcome some key changes in this bill, which will bring more inclusive language into key legislation. These changes may seem small and largely semantic, but language matters and this move towards inclusivity is a meaningful change for a significant section of Canberra's LGBTIQ+ communities.

While there are, unfortunately, many out there who would try to make a cultural war out of it, the fact of the matter is there are people who are not women who can get pregnant and who are pregnant. For trans men, and many who do not fit on a gender binary, acknowledging this can be a simple but important shift in language, and I am pleased to see this shift across ACT government and now in legislation. Despite deeply misguided pushback, where this language has already been adopted it has led to better outcomes, particularly in medical settings.

I also need to be clear: attacks against pregnant women are a known form of gendered violence. For many women, their identity as a pregnant woman is a joyous and gender-affirming idea, and I can appreciate that another form of gendered violence is the intentional erasure of women from protection. Misogyny often targets the rights of women when they are pregnant, and, of course, also targets our rights to decide when to be pregnant. The attacks we see all too often on abortion rights, or the disproportionate responsibility on women to manage contraception use is absolutely rooted in misogyny. But similarly, transphobia, which paints trans men and anyone else with a uterus as a woman, means that trans and gender diverse communities are also victims of these attacks on reproductive rights.

The same applies to pregnancy, and that is ultimately why I am really comfortable with the term "pregnant people" as the catch-all phrase in law. It protects all pregnant women and extends the protection to other people who are pregnant. It does not limit, in any way, the protection afforded to pregnant women. It invites more people in, people who are often still likely to experience gendered violence, compounded by transphobia and a desire to deny their identity.

Our struggle against gendered violence, Mr Deputy Speaker, frankly, is a shared one, and the more people we protect against that the better. The principle that no-one, regardless of their gender identity, should be discriminated against when they are pregnant is a very simple one, and I think an entirely uncontroversial one. The Greens are proud to support amendments to the Discrimination Act and the Crimes Act which ensure that there cannot be any discrimination against any pregnant people.

Another key language change which is deeply welcome is a more inclusive definition

of domestic partnerships. I welcome removing the specificity that domestic partnerships can be between people, regardless of gender, and, frankly, we should be glad to be in a city where it no longer needs specifying that people of the same gender can indeed be in relationships with each other; it is just a matter of course. This should now be entirely uncontroversial, but let's remember that we can never take it for granted.

On a similar note, I welcome replacing the term "sex" with "gender" in most cases, while also preserving "sex characteristics", and adding "sex" as protected characteristics for the purposes of anti-discrimination and vilification laws. Again, this is in many ways a small change, but it is another confirmation that, as we should all know by now, some people are and may have a variety of differing sex characteristics, and some people are not the gender that they were assigned at birth.

I have said it multiple times in this place, but I will take the opportunity to say it again: trans women are women, trans men are men, and people of all other gender identities are valid in these identities.

What I have heard from those I have spoken to in the Canberra LGBTIQ+ community is that these are minor but welcome changes in a more inclusive direction. I was pleased to see the government had rightly approached and consulted with the Office of LGBTIQ+ Affairs on this bill. I would encourage them to ensure they consult more broadly with community, and not just with this office—based on the explanatory statement—but nevertheless they are welcome changes.

I will speak very briefly in my capacity as the Greens spokesperson for education to welcome changes to the working with vulnerable people act. We are all aware that this has been an incredibly difficult period for parents, educators, and, of course, very importantly, children in the early childhood education and care sector. This bill, of course, will not and is not designed to fix these systemic issues in their entirety, but I do very much welcome Access Canberra having the explicit ability to coordinate with the relevant national authority. Thank you.

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) (4.37), in reply: I am pleased to speak in closing on this bill. In doing so, I wish to clarify something. Ms Barry was sending a message, I think, to JACS or the broader community, saying, "The opposition is ambitious for more reform," and, with this sort of legislation, "Why are you doing this?" I am very confused, but I suggest that perhaps Ms Barry and I can have a talk about it.

I will not belabour the point; effectively, this is an omnibus legislative amendment bill. We are looking to do tidy-ups and progress minor amendments—ones which do not bear or warrant having their own bill, so they are routinely presented as an omnibus bill. Members will see plenty more, and long may that be the case in this place.

I do not resile from wanting more reform, and I welcome that, but tell me what is not significant reform: when I look at what is on the bills list at the moment, and what is before Ms Barry, as the chair of the relevant committee, there is the Crimes Legislation Amendment Bill, the Family, Personal and Sexual Violence Legislation Amendment Bill, the Magistrates Court (Indicative Sentencing) Amendment Bill, and the Firearms

(Public Safety) Amendment Bill. Of course, bail reform is coming, and there is more on the way.

These are all significant bills, and they are significant pieces of reform. We are talking about this omnibus bill which does what it is supposed to do; that is the purpose of it. If having one of these means that we are not doing reform, I suggest perhaps that members have a closer look at the bills list.

I table a revised explanatory statement to the bill. That is in response to thoughtful comments that we received from the Standing Committee on Legal Affairs in its legislative scrutiny role. I was able to write back to the committee at the beginning of this week, on my first day back. These changes, quite simply, provide clarity on a minor limitation on the right to privacy by the amendments to the Wills Act 1968. I do appreciate the fact that that was pointed out. The scrutiny role is appropriately scrutinising, and we are the better for it, so I appreciate that.

The bill makes amendments to 13 pieces of legislation to improve their operation, in order to keep pace with community expectations. Together, while each of these is minor and largely technical, these amendments improve the ACT's justice and community safety legislation, ensuring that it is of the highest standard, facilitates the practical operation of justice sector agencies, and best supports and protects the ACT community.

Going to some substance, the bill enhances the operation of two of our most important justice institutions, ACAT and the ACT Human Rights Commission. The amendments to the ACAT Act refine the way that matters are managed before ACAT, improving efficiency and ensuring that the tribunal can continue to deliver accessible, timely justice for the community. Similarly, changes to the Human Rights Commission Act strengthen the commission's ability to handle complaints and inquiries, supporting its vital role in safeguarding and promoting the rights of Canberrans.

Mr Deputy Speaker, the legal profession carries significant responsibilities and, accordingly, there are high community expectations about their standards of conduct. You would be aware that these are very serious responsibilities that are undertaken by the Law Society and, of course, the Bar Association. Of relevance to this bill, it amends the Legal Profession Act to provide more effective and appropriate remedies for unsatisfactory professional conduct of legal practitioners. We are also making amendments to the Official Visitor Act to clarify eligibility requirements for the appointment of Official Visitors and to strengthen their conflict-of-interest obligations.

As flagged before, the bill amends the Wills Act to facilitate the effective management of the centralised wills register for the ACT under the Public Trustee and Guardian, improving data security and records management, and creating easier searching and a single source of truth.

Of relevance to the executive motion being debated next, the bill will improve community safety by making some minor amendments to the Discrimination Act and the Criminal Code to expand protections against vilification and serious vilification relating to the attribute of sex and relating to persons who are associated with persons who have protected attributes. Again, they look to be minor, and they are, but what they do and allow is actually very significant.

This, of course, follows a huge undertaking that we committed to and delivered last term regarding the review of the Discrimination Act. I will probably have a little bit to say about what I am actually being called on to do in reviewing it so soon in the debate on the next motion, so I will leave it until then.

In terms of the comments about the amendment regarding pregnant people, again, I am somewhat taken aback by some of the comments from the opposition, and particularly the characterisation of what occurred regarding a possible amendment. With the language, certainly, I took it that it was sounding like, “It’s the government’s way or the highway. We’re just going to do this. We don’t consult—whatever we want to do.” That is not it at all.

I had no idea that the opposition even had an issue, until Tuesday night this week, and this is a bill that we introduced in the first week of December. I feel that that is quite a lot of time when I could have been given some earlier notice. In terms of the Parliamentary Counsel’s Office, their drafting ability and that they were not able to do it, they were not given any time to do it.

Ms Barry: I was not blaming them. I was just saying they were not able to do it. I did not blame anybody.

MS CHEYNE: Okay. Certainly, the language that I thought Ms Barry was using—and I am happy to check the transcript—seemed to reflect on the PCO. I found that, again, particularly breathtaking, given the letter that I wrote and the issuing of the guidelines; that is all about respecting PCO’s time and giving them enough notice. It might seem like a simple amendment, but if it is going to then have further consequential amendments, time is needed. I will take it as it is; but, for the benefit of everyone in the chamber, please do respect PCO’s time. I certainly back them, if they say, “We can’t get this done in time. You haven’t given us enough time to be able to prepare that amendment for you.”

In terms of why we could not come to an agreement, or adjourn this and find a compromise position, the thing is that we have already been very clear that we are making a whole-of-government effort to update the statute book with gender-neutral language. I think Miss Nuttall has quite eloquently explained that the term “pregnant people” simply acknowledges everyone who can be pregnant, including women, and including people who are gender diverse. It does not erase women. It does not diminish women. Women are fully visible and central in pregnancy care.

Inclusive language expands dignity and accuracy. It ensures that no-one is excluded or misrepresented in health care. Those inclusive practices do not erase cisgender women; they expand recognition to all who bear children. Using the term “pregnant people” simply protects the rights, safety and wellbeing of all groups without diminishing women’s recognition.

If this was the first time that we were making this sort of change, perhaps some of Ms Barry’s comments would have been taken with a little bit less of a grain of salt, I suppose. But the ACT government already allow individuals to change the sex marker on their birth certificates by using free-text descriptors. This was a really important

debate that we had last term, and really significant legislation on which we were very pleased to work with the Greens. It is certainly an indelible memory for me, having regard to what we were able to achieve with that, and the lives that Miss Nuttall and I know have been changed because of that legislation. That has now been in place for some time, and it means that people can record non-binary or other gender identities on their official documents.

Passing these amendments is really quite consequential. It ensures that all people in the ACT are enjoying equal access to their human rights and legal protections, in how they are being described. Again, it is not like this is a new term. The term “pregnant people” is already used across our statute book, and this is continuing to ensure that other relevant parts of our statute book are keeping pace. It is already in the Health Act, it is already in the Parentage Act and it is already in the Assisted Reproductive Technology Act.

I do regret how the last few days have been characterised. I am all for a good compromise, but we are certainly not going to step away from things that have long been our policy commitments, as a Labor government. Certainly, it is enacting recommendations that have come through multiple different reviews which we have agreed to deliver on. It has not been done by stealth; it is not a secret. We have been very open about it, and that is simply what this legislation is enabling today.

Of course, ensuring the safety of children in early education and care settings is paramount. The bill will amend the Working with Vulnerable People (Background Checking) Act 2011 to strengthen the protection of children in early education and care settings. Obviously, this is, regrettably, incredibly topical, and there was much said about it this morning. Critically, it will enable better information sharing between Access Canberra and the national body responsible for the national register of individuals subject to prohibition notices. This will ensure that critical information is able to be shared to better protect children from harm.

The bill promotes respect for identity and belonging by amending the Domestic Relationships Act and the Legislation Act to make references to domestic partnerships and civil partnerships more inclusive. These changes seek to ensure that our legislation reflects the diversity of relationships in our community and to reinforce the government’s longstanding commitment to promoting equality and recognition before the law.

Finally, this is a bill that makes minor amendments to the Major Events Act to clarify the application of events and other provisions to ensure the safe and effective management of the major events that all Canberrans enjoy. Of course, the explanatory statement, in JACS’s and PCO’s usual style, is beautifully drafted, and there is plenty of detail about what those amendments do in that.

In closing, while the amendments in the bill being introduced today are of a minor and technical nature, they will make noticeable improvements to our legislation, ensuring that our justice system is modern, fair and responsive to community needs and expectations. I greatly appreciate all those who have worked on this bill. I acknowledge the comments that have been made, and I will certainly underline those. There was a lot of input from stakeholders and across government. I certainly thank, in particular,

the Office of LGBTIQ+ Affairs for their engagement in the last few days, to reaffirm what we understood to be true.

It is a very worthy bill, and I commend it to the Assembly.

Bill agreed to in principle.

Leave granted to dispense with the detail stage.

Bill agreed to.

Racism—condemnation of the March for Australia rally

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) (4.53): I move:

That this Assembly:

(1) notes that:

- (a) on 26 January 2026, anti-immigration rallies were held in Canberra and across Australia;
- (b) the rallies were used to promote messages of racism, including antisemitism and Islamophobia;
- (c) following alleged antisemitic conduct at the “March for Australia” rally in Sydney, a man has been charged with a criminal offence under new hate speech enacted by the *Crimes Amendment (Inciting Racial Hatred) Act 2025* (NSW);
- (d) in what is being investigated as a potential terror attack, a bomb was thrown into a peaceful “Invasion Day” rally in Perth, also on 26 January 2026;
- (e) this conduct is not isolated, it is enabled through racist and xenophobic messaging promoted at events like “March for Australia” rallies and is a continued and visible demonstration of extremist ideologies that threaten the cohesion and safety of our community;
- (f) demonstrations of hatred have been seen in Canberra, including attacks on places of worship and through distribution of racist, white supremacist materials in our suburbs; and
- (g) this Assembly has unanimously called on all Members to condemn the anti-immigration sentiment expressed at a previous “March for Australia” rally;

(2) acknowledges:

- (a) the importance of multiculturalism and the significant benefits that Canberra’s cultural and linguistic diversity bring to our community;
- (b) the vast majority of Canberrans reject extremist ideologies and value the contributions that our multiculturalism brings to our community;
- (c) the Government is working to prevent further harm coming to our community, both through the efforts of ACT Policing in collaboration

with federal intelligence agencies, as well as through early interventions for those who may be susceptible to extremist ideologies;

- (d) the right to peaceful protest, as demonstrated at Canberra’s “Invasion Day” rally that was also held on 26 January 2026, should be protected;
 - (e) the Government has committed to review hate crime and vilification laws;
 - (f) that repairing social cohesion and countering extremist narratives requires both legislative and non-legislative responses; and
 - (g) that it is therefore incumbent on community leaders, including elected representatives, to unequivocally call out hatred and messages that are contrary to the values of our Canberra community; and
- (3) calls on:
- (a) all Members to condemn the anti-immigrant, racist and xenophobic messaging advanced at anti-immigration rallies, including the “March for Australia” rally held on 26 January 2026; and
 - (b) the Government to introduce legislation to strengthen hate crime and vilification laws in 2026.

I rise today to move a motion condemning the racism and hatred that were on display at recent anti-immigration rallies held here in Canberra and across Australia on 26 January. I do so to make clear this government’s unwavering commitment to every member of our community, regardless of their background, regardless of their faith and regardless of where life’s journey has taken them: Canberra is their home, and they are welcome here. It is disappointing that we as a city find ourselves needing to debate a motion like this, but it is necessary, because hatred left unchallenged does not fade away; it grows.

Any attack on Canberrans based on their ethnicity, their religion or the place they once called home must be called out. It must be challenged, and it must be rejected. These rallies on 26 January claimed to be a so-called “march for Australia”. They presented themselves as an attempt to spark a sincere conversation about the public policy of immigration. But what we saw, as we have seen before, was something very different. A thin veneer was used to mask the platforming of extremist ideology. They gave space to neo-Nazis, their rhetoric and their behaviour. This ideology seeks to reduce people to nothing more than their ethnicity or their faith, and to vilify them on that basis alone. What was said about members of our community—about their place here, their legitimacy, their right to belong—was abhorrent. And some of it may well be criminal.

Following antisemitic comments that prosecutors have described as “brazen and public incitement of hatred towards the Jewish community”, a man in New South Wales is now facing hate speech charges that could see him imprisoned. Mr Speaker, tearing down your fellow community members is not marching for your country. It is marching for hatred. It is not “just a debate” to ridicule people’s place in our community because of their faith or their background. It is not a “policy idea” to suggest that someone should be removed because of the colour of their skin. That is hatred. Unfortunately, we have seen that hatred extend beyond rallies across the country, to right here in our community in other ways. We have now seen for some time racist and white supremacist materials distributed in our suburbs. We have seen places of worship

targeted. We have seen hate speech graffitied on the walls of temples. None of this is acceptable.

The ACT government continues to unequivocally condemn all forms of racism and discrimination. Canberra is a welcoming city. We pride ourselves on fairness, understanding and respect for one another. These are the very reasons that so many people choose to make Canberra their home, from across Australia and the world.

Encouragingly, the views on display at these rallies are not shared by the vast majority of Canberrans. Most people recognise that our diversity is a strength, not a threat. They recognise the rhetoric for what it is—an attempt by fringe groups to strip people of their humanity, to disguise deep-seated hatred behind false pretences and to drag extremist world views into the mainstream. Importantly, our community also understands the importance of peaceful protest and free speech. As the home of the national parliament, Canberra is a city of debate and democratic participation. People must be free to protest safely and peacefully. Not every person will support every protest. Debate is often and can be uncomfortable. But protests can and must remain peaceful.

The Invasion Day rallies held in Canberra and across the country each year demonstrate this. They are peaceful, they do not seek to denigrate members of our community, and they raise important questions about justice, history and the wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. It is therefore so deeply concerning to me that the same protest held in Perth was targeted by a terrorist bombing attack. Thankfully, it failed—an act driven by hatred of those protesting and of the values that they represent. It is increasingly clear they are the values that have inspired that person as well.

The ACT government is committed to protecting our community and strengthening responses to hate, violence, antisemitism, Islamophobia and racism in all its forms. This includes law enforcement efforts, early intervention and legislative reform. That is why we will work this year to strengthen our hate crime and vilification laws, building on reforms already made to the Discrimination Act, and on legislation passed to outlaw the public display of Nazi symbols.

These laws send a clear message: there is no place for inciting hatred or violence in our city. Canberra is a place where people are free to live as they are and to participate without fear.

It is fitting that this motion comes before us on the eve of our annual Multicultural Festival—a celebration that brings hundreds of thousands of people together to showcase the richness of our community. It is a reminder that our diversity uplifts our city and strengthens our shared future.

Hatred has no home in Canberra and, as an Assembly, we have a responsibility to say that clearly and collectively. This motion draws a line—a line that rejects racism and xenophobia, a line that affirms our shared values, and a line that says this Assembly stands with our community, united against hatred and the so-called march for Australia rallies that spew it. I commend this motion to the Assembly, and I urge all members to support it.

MS BARRY (Ginninderra) (5.00): I rise to respond to Mr Pettersson's motion. When

I first read this motion, I will be honest; I struggled to understand what the government was seeking to achieve. I read it under a microscope, I read it under a light, I read it with a magnifying glass, and I struggled to understand the purpose of this motion, because the views of this Assembly on this matter were already very clear. This Assembly had, on multiple occasions, passed motions which unanimously supported the condemnation of hate speech, vilification and violence. Just yesterday, that unity was powerfully reflected in the condolence debate following the horrific Bondi attack.

The ACT already has both civil and criminal penalties for hate speech and incitement, as well as the protections afforded by the Human Rights Act. This government has itself acknowledged that these legislative settings will be reviewed, as the Attorney-General has indicated, considering recent events and developments in other jurisdictions. This is an appropriate course of action and one that I would expect will attract broad and likely unanimous support in this chamber.

This motion simply reaffirms that shared position. It would pass without controversy. Unfortunately, I am not sure that this is what Mr Pettersson's motion tries to do. Instead, it seeks to bind this Assembly to support whatever legislative changes this Labor government chooses to bring forward, before those changes have been drafted, scrutinised or consulted on. This is not consensus-building; it is an attempt to manufacture what I think is a political farce.

Regrettably, this approach has become characteristic of this government. In the last sitting, they rushed through changes to the Working with Vulnerable People check, bypassing the established scrutiny process, despite assurances to the commonwealth that the Assembly would be afforded the opportunity to conduct proper due diligence. Extraordinarily, after that legislation passed, we then had a lecture from the minister, criticising the opposition for not identifying defects during scrutiny.

I say to this government: it cannot have it both ways. The Canberra Liberals and I stand for a robust legislative process. We will continue to insist that legislation is properly examined in this place, reviewed through our committee system and, where appropriate, opened up for public consultation. That is how good laws are made. This is how unintended consequences are avoided. This is how we bring the community with us when difficult reforms are required.

For that reason, the Canberra Liberals have a fundamental, in-principle objection to being asked to sign up to legislation that we have not even seen—and we will probably be criticised if we do. It is legislation that has not been scrutinised and on which the community has not had the opportunity to be consulted.

But this is no surprise. We have seen this approach before. At the federal level, Labor attempted to push through a deeply flawed and rushed bill on this very issue, with minimal scrutiny and no meaningful consultation. Even with the government's ideological fixation on social controls and social engineering, they were simply not prepared; nor are the Canberra Liberals prepared to provide the blank cheque that this motion demands.

My office and I have tried, as much as we could, to reach a consensus position. Unfortunately, that has not occurred. Accordingly, I now move the amendment that has

been circulated in my name:

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

“(1) notes:

- (a) that this Assembly has previously noted and Members have and continue to unanimously condemn the rise in racism and violence being played out during public demonstrations, and the increase in racially and religiously motivated violence against individuals, communities, community organisations and community facilities;
- (b) No 46—5 February 2026 819 that there is broad consensus that there needs to be an appropriate balance between the right to express an opinion, including the right to peacefully protest, and the importance of ensuring there are appropriate protections in place to ensure that freedom of expression is not abused;
- (c) that in the ACT, we are fortunate to have the Discrimination Act 1991, which at sections 65-67 provide civil and criminal penalties for racial vilification;
- (d) that in 2025, NSW passed the Crimes Amendment (Inciting Racial Hatred) Act;
- (e) and the ACT Government has committed to review hate crime and vilification laws;

(2) acknowledges:

- (a) the importance of multiculturalism, and the significant benefits that Canberra’s culture and linguistic diversity bring to our community;
- (b) that the vast majority of Canberrans reject extremist ideologies and value the contributions that our multiculturalism brings to our community; and
- (c) that the work to prevent to prevent further harm coming to our community, involves collaboration across jurisdictions and political differences, to demonstrate clear expectations and reflect Australian values; and

(3) calls on the ACT Government to:

- (a) review the Discrimination Act 1991 as it relates to hate crime to determine:
 - (i) whether it remains fit for purpose;
 - (ii) whether there are any lessons learned from more recent legislative processes such as the NSW Crimes Amendment (Inciting Racial Hatred) Act, that can be adapted to improve the Act legislation; and
- (b) ensure that all Members of this Assembly are consulted at the drafting stage of any potential legislative reform process, to ensure that by our behaviour, we model the Australian values of respectful disagreement that we are seeking to encourage in the broader community;
- (c) aspire to achieve unanimous support for any legislative change, that appropriately balances the right of free speech with appropriate protection from incitement and racial vilification.”.

In the spirit of collegiality and working on a shared purpose, my amendment tries to

capture what I hope is the intent of the minister's motion. It differs from the government's initial motion in several critical aspects. First, it makes no distinction as to the source of hate speech, vilification or violence. Our position is clear: all hate speech, vilification and violence are abhorrent and should be treated equally under the law. Second, it explicitly recognises the need to balance competing but fundamental public policy objectives protecting the community from harm, whilst guarding freedom of speech and the right to protest—a very fundamental pillar of our democracy, I must add.

These are first-order rights in any democratic system. We must resist the temptation to introduce legislation that sounds reassuring in intent but, in practice, erodes the very fundamental freedoms that underpin our democracy. I acknowledge that getting the balance right can be difficult, but it would not be helped by finger-pointing or point-scoring in this place.

Third, and most importantly, my amendment commits all members of this Assembly to work together to find that balance. Canberrans expect us to put aside our political differences to engage constructively and to develop laws that strengthen both our community and our democratic institutions.

The Canberra Liberals will support sensible legislative reform, but only when it is subject to proper scrutiny and genuine public consultation. I commend my amendment 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) (5.07), by leave: I move:

1. After paragraph (1)(e), insert:

- “(f) on 26 January 2026, anti-immigration rallies were held in Canberra and across Australia;
- (g) the rallies were used to promote messages of racism, including antisemitism and Islamophobia;
- (h) following alleged antisemitic conduct at the “March for Australia” rally in Sydney, a man has been charged with a criminal offence under new hate speech enacted by the Crimes Amendment (Inciting Racial Hatred) Act 2025 (NSW);
- (i) a bomb was thrown into a peaceful “Invasion Day” rally in Perth on 26 January 2026 in what authorities have declared to be a terrorist attack;”.

2. Add after paragraph (3):

- “(4) calls on all Members to condemn the anti-immigrant, racist and xenophobic messaging advanced at anti-immigration rallies, including the “March for Australia” rally held on 26 January 2026.”.

I rise to speak so promptly again in this debate to be crystal clear about the question before this place and to propose what I hope is an improvement that will be accepted. I need to be crystal clear about this: this Assembly is on a trajectory to weaken our response to March for Australia. The response that this Assembly agreed to last year was strong and uniform and I think spoke to the values of our city.

I am mildly mortified at Ms Barry's amendment and its attempt to remove actual references to the harm that is occurring in our community by refusing to name it. I think it is important and incumbent upon elected leaders to stand up and speak out when they see things that are not okay. What I have seen at March for Australia rallies is not okay, it is not acceptable, and we need to name it. I do not think it is acceptable not to name it.

The amazing thing about the amendment that is before us is that it could be moved any day of the week in any month of any year, and it would mean exactly the same thing. There is little to no context in it. It deliberately does not speak to the moment that we are in, and I think that is hugely troubling. I do not support watering down the Assembly's stance on these rallies, but I understand the numbers in this place and what is going to occur.

The other thing about this amendment that I find deeply troubling is it removes references to the terrorism that First Nations Australians are experiencing at the hands of white supremacists in this country—and they are linked. When we enable people to stand up and spew vile hatred, of white supremacy, of racism, of discrimination, to not then see the immediate link between people with alleged white supremacist views that are alleged to have thrown bombs into crowds, beggars belief. I think it is incredibly clear to the Canberra and Australian community as a whole that there is a growing problem here. So we need to be more vocal and more clear in our condemnation of it.

This motion here today does not change the law. What I am calling for the Assembly to do, once again, is to use our voice as leaders, to show leadership. The one thing that will truly solve hate in our community, as best as we every could, is community coming together through a shared vision of connectivity, empathy and understanding. That takes courage from political leaders. So I am dismayed that explicit references to where this hatred is coming from are being removed, and I cannot for the life of me understand why those references have been removed.

The other thing about it that is remarkable to me, and I think is central to the motion I have put forward, is that this motion is a condemnation of March for Australia. This amendment seeks to remove that. I cannot explain that. I cannot explain why on earth anyone would move that amendment.

As I attempt to claw back some of the motion I put forward, which is largely getting stripped away, I want to just put on record some of the things that will not be included. I think it is important that those things are on the public record. I have been able to get agreement to add some of the events that have occurred, but the context I wanted to add—and the original motion, for members, that have it in front of them who are able to read along, and those who are watching along—is that this conduct is not isolated. It is enabled through racist and xenophobic messaging promoted at events like March for Australia rallies.

It is a continued and visible demonstration of extremist ideologies that threaten the cohesion and safety of our community. Demonstrations of hatred have been seen in Canberra, including attacks on places of worship, and through distribution of racist, white supremacist materials in our suburbs. This Assembly has unanimously called on

all members to condemn the anti-immigration sentiment expressed at a previous March for Australia rally. Also not going to get across the line is that the right to peaceful protest should be protected. I think these are important contributions, but they are not going to be in the final motion—and that is what it is.

The other thing that I want to be crystal clear on is that this motion here today is calling for moral leadership from us as parliamentarians, as community leaders. It is also calling for the government, as we have already indicated, to bring forward legislation to begin to address some of these issues. This parliament is ultimately the body that will decide what the laws of the ACT are. What I am indicating is that the government wants to do this work, and I want the chamber to show their support of the government doing that work and bringing it forward.

I hold grave concerns about this amendment as a whole. I am moving amendments to the amendment to try and recover some of the original motion, to try and keep it somewhat in line with the original motion the Assembly passed condemning March for Australia. But, even with my amendments, it will still be weaker, and that will be hard to explain to the Canberra community.

MR PARTON (Brindabella) (5.13): I am sorry to say that I am pretty disappointed with the process that has led us to having this debate today in the way that we are having it, particularly given the week that we are having it.

We got word from the Pettersson office earlier in the week that such a motion would be moved. At that moment, I thought, “Well that is really good,” because it fits hand in glove with the Bondi condolence motion from earlier in the week, where we all stood and collectively grieved and we, I guess, collectively clung to hope and optimism. But Mr Pettersson, in his speech just said that the amendment that has come from Ms Barry could have been moved on any day of any week. But the thing is, it is not any day of any week. This is the week that we came together as an Assembly to remember the 15 victims of that horrible terror attack at Bondi Beach on 14 December of last year.

The motion as it was presented by Mr Pettersson only had a passing reference to antisemitism and no reference whatsoever to the events of 14 December. I find that quite remarkable. Obviously, it pushes the government along with regard to the legislation that is coming to us as a consequence of the events of 14 December 14. But the motion does not even mention that. The motion focused almost entirely on other events; namely, the rallies on Australia Day. Racial hatred is racial hatred, irrespective of who it is being directed at and who is perpetrating it. Calling for calm and social cohesion in this way, in chambers like this, where possible, should not involve finger-pointing. It just should not involve finger pointing.

I applaud Ms Barry for drafting the most sensible knock-down rebuild amendment to this motion. I applaud Mr Rattenbury and Mr Braddock for their collaborative engagement on this highly sensitive issue—because it is sensitive. I know Mr Pettersson understands that it is sensitive. I know that he gets how much pain is involved in this. We are here to bring people together, not to divide them.

I also understand that the wording of the motion that we will pass today is not going to please everyone. It is not going to appease every individual and every community. I

have already spoken with some community leaders who have indicated that they are not going to be entirely happy with it. But they are happier with what is there now than what was there earlier. At this point, in this extremely troubled space, it would be virtually impossible to come up with a set of words that would be universally agreed to. I think we also have to accept that when it comes to the context of this debate. The thing that we are working towards here is almost impossible to achieve. But we have done our level best to arrive at a series of amendments that are palatable in a large part to everyone. I cannot remember which amendment I am commending now, but I am confident that, when we get to the end, it is going to be good.

MS TOUGH (Brindabella) (5.17): I rise to support Minister Pettersson's motion and his amendments. I thank the minister for bringing this motion and for his work that he has done on this in this space. It is vital for those of us in this place to call out racism, to call out hate, to call out antisemitism and to call out March for Australia. Canberra and Australia should be welcoming places, not places where people feel unsafe in their own city, in their own homes.

On 26 January, I was privileged to represent the Chief Minister, and join the Leader of the Opposition, at the Australia Day national flag-raising and citizenship ceremony, with the Prime Minister, Governor General, Australian of the Year and over 20 new citizens who received their citizenship on the shores of Lake Burley Griffin on a beautiful Canberra summer day. But, on that same day, racist marches occurred here in Canberra and across the country, including an incident of alleged antisemitism in Sydney. There was a bomb thrown into a crowd at an Invasion Day rally in Perth—a bomb—into a crowd of mostly First Nations people by an alleged white supremacist, that today has been declared a terrorist attack. We should be calling that out. It is sheer luck that bomb did not go off in that crowd.

It is saddening to have this motion, a few days before the National Multicultural Festival here in Canberra—a big celebration we have of our multicultural community; a festival that says that Canberra is a welcoming, wonderful and amazing place—but it is important that we have this motion and we call out hate and we call out what is going on and stand together and use the power and privilege that we have in this place to do that. So I thank Minister Pettersson for bringing this motion, and commend this motion and his amendments to the Assembly.

DR PATERSON (Murrumbidgee—Minister for Police, Fire and Emergency Services, Minister for Women, Minister for the Prevention of Family and Domestic Violence, Minister for Corrections and Minister for Gaming Reform) (5.20): I was not going to speak on this, but I just could not help myself, given the shameful watering down of Mr Pettersson's motion. I thought this motion was accurate and respectful and really went to the heart of the problem, in terms of calling out the racism and xenophobia that has been displayed through these March for Australia rallies. As Mr Pettersson and Ms Tough said, unless we call it out, we are basically allowing the perpetuation of this racism to occur in our community.

I want to reiterate my distress that the paragraphs have been removed. I do not understand why they cannot be in the motion that everyone agrees to. I will repeat the paragraphs:

(e) this conduct is not isolated, it is enabled through racist and xenophobic messaging promoted at events like “March for Australia” rallies and is a continued and visible demonstration of extremist ideologies that threaten the cohesion and safety of our community;

If we cannot call out these extremist ideologies, if that is such a sensitive problem for the Canberra Liberals and the Greens, then we have a big problem in this chamber. The motion continued:

(f) demonstrations of hatred have been seen in Canberra, including attacks on places of worship and through distribution of racist, white supremacist materials in our suburbs;

This is horrific. We have seen this happen in multiple suburbs around Canberra. Again, I do not understand why this is distasteful, calling this out, for the Canberra Liberals and the Greens.

I strongly support Minister Pettersson’s point that the “Assembly has unanimously called on all members to condemn the anti-immigration sentiment expressed at the previous March for Australia rally”. We have heard from our multicultural community about how distressing these March for Australia rallies are. We have heard from the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community about how distressing these March for Australia rallies are. So it is deeply distressing that members of the chamber have sought to eliminate these points from this motion today.

MR BRADDOCK (Yerrabi) (5.22): I want to take a moment to thank Donna and Dennis for the handling of the blizzard of amendments we have got going on here. We appreciate your support.

I aspire that we can have a respectful debate here today on this topic. As elected representatives, our responsibility is to model behaviours that uphold that pledge. The public expect us to act like adults, they expect us to bring our best selves to work every day, and they expect us to not amplify division that so many in the community are feeling so deeply and so personally.

Dr Paterson: Well, call it out.

MR BRADDOCK: Minister Paterson, I have already informed you that we are calling it out. We are supporting his amendments. So please withdraw your comments.

Hate speech against one community is hate against us all. It is dangerous and must be stamped out. Hate speech has never and will never be acceptable in Canberra. This is a city where everyone, no matter their faith, heritage or identity must feel safe to live and thrive as themselves. However, what is also dangerous is the increasing sentiment that we must stamp out the right to peaceful protest. That principle sits at the very heart of our democracy. But let me be clear: there is a firm and necessary line between free speech and hate speech, and it is our shared responsibility every single day to recognise, respect and uphold the distinction between those two very different things.

Apologies; this part of the speech has not kept up with the blizzard of amendments, but we could have started with either the government’s motion or Ms Barry’s amendments,

but my ultimate goal was to see a motion passed today that condemns racism while also unifying our community. The Greens, as I indicated just a bit earlier, will be supporting Mr Pettersson's amendments, which include the element which is the main call, being the original motion, explicitly condemning the anti-immigrant, racist and xenophobic messaging from the March for Australia rallies. We have also supported the amendments that are coming from Ms Barry, which include essential elements such as the right to peaceful protest and the crafting of hate speech legislation.

Let us be very clear; the Greens condemn the March for Australia. We put up a motion last year, which got unanimous support from this Assembly to that effect. I condemn any messaging that is anti-immigrant, racist or xenophobic, wherever it may occur. That is my responsibility as Greens spokesperson for anti-racism, as a parliamentarian and as a representative of the Canberra community.

The March for Australia rallies, with their anti-immigration messaging, are causing pain and angst for many in our community. As a direct result of these rallies, diverse communities here in Canberra have mentioned to me that they feel that their contribution to our community is not being valued. Therefore, I stand up on behalf of the Greens and specifically call out March for Australia's messaging that is anti-immigrant, racist and xenophobic for what it is.

I particularly condemn the people who are coordinating the March for Australia rallies, funding them or pulling the strings—Neo-Nazis weaponising people's frustrations about the cost of living and economic inequalities against migrant communities. Unfortunately, by targeting others, the March for Australia rallies not only divide our community but also fail as a campaign for anything that will meaningfully improve their lives. Individuals who attend March for Australia rallies are often doing it tough economically and looking for someone to blame. But it is not appropriate or acceptable to blame people of colour; it only fuels racist hate, further divides our community and takes our attention away from the real causes of the issues. Attendance at a March for Australia rally is a racist act because it amplifies the racist messaging and brings harm to others in our community. Sorry, my speech has not kept up with that part either.

What we need to learn from the attempted attack at the Survival Day rally in Perth is that, where rhetoric and commentary become divisive and words start to drip with hate and malice, the leap to physical violence becomes shorter and shorter. This is why we need to ensure our words and our actions promote inclusivity and common humanity. We do, however, still need to call out the behaviour where it tries to wedge between us.

Also, as just a short note, we must respect the names that First Nations people have selected for their rallies—those being Sovereignty Day in Canberra and Survival Day in Perth. To which I move the following amendment to Mr Pettersson's amendments to Ms Barry's amendment:

In paragraph (1):

(i), omit "Invasion Day", substitute "Survival Day".

A word of warning also: we need to be careful about the use of the phrase "social cohesion". While on the surface it sounds admirable and desirable, we cannot hide behind the term to whitewash issues regarding racism or justify the suppression of

peaceful protest. We must be prepared to actively call out racism in order to not allow hate to fester. We must not return to the days of assimilation.

We also support the aspiration for unanimous support for any legislative change. I would hope that we could aspire to everyone in this place being able to support these legislative changes—but this cannot be an essential requirement. We cannot allow for the conditions where one single member, regardless of which political ideology, can veto legislative changes that would benefit the Canberra community. We must also recall that the federal legislation passed a few weeks ago was rushed and became, in the Greens view, unsalvageable from a human rights perspective. We must not make a *carte-blanche* call for the strengthening of hate crime and vilification laws without also being clear about how we want them to be strengthened.

I am a proud member of the Greens—a party of peace and non-violence, anti-racism and peaceful protest—and I intend to uphold those values not just today but every day. The Greens position is simple: hatred against one community is hatred against all of us, and it must be confronted wherever it appears. But we will never defeat antisemitism, Islamophobia or any other form of racism or broader discrimination by treating them as separate, siloed problems. These hatreds do not exist in isolation; they are interconnected and mutually reinforcing. Until we recognise that and stand against all forms of hate together, we will continue to fail the very communities we are elected to serve.

MS STEPHEN-SMITH (Kurrajong—Minister for Health, Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Finance and Minister for the Public Service) (5.29): I have no idea which set of amendments I am speaking to, but I am speaking generally about this whole debate. I want to start with a couple of quotes. Firstly:

Across the country, a small but loud group of anti-Australian activists is working to redefine who we are, what our traditions mean, and even what Australia Day represents.

Secondly:

For years, Australia's unity and shared values have been weakened by policies and movements that set Australians against one another.

These are quotes from the March for Australia website in its blurb promoting the recent marches. It is, in my view, an ironic framing of these marches—events that, by all accounts, saw a minority group seeking to divide the Australian community along racial and cultural lines. It is especially hypocritical coming from those who would take Australia Day, a day marked across the country with ceremonies welcoming new citizens from around the world, and turn it into a display of exclusion.

Reports of these rallies suggest some participants were performing Nazi salutes and using white nationalist rhetoric. As noted in Mr Pettersson's circulated amendment, New South Wales police announcing an arrest at the Sydney march allege:

... the language he used, his presence, was clearly and unequivocally aligned with Neo-Nazi ideology and his presence and language incited response from the crowd generating hate towards a particular group in our community.

In light of the devastating events at Bondi on 14 December, a terrorist attack against the Jewish community that took 15 lives, and in light of the Australian community's devastation at that antisemitic attack, that anyone would attend a march or support someone expressing that kind of sentiment must be extremely hurtful for people who are already hurting so much—a community and the Jewish community that experiences intergenerational trauma as a result of centuries of persecution and, of course, the absolutely devastating history of the Holocaust and World War II.

I thank Mr Pettersson for bringing this motion forward today. He has rightly identified the importance of us, as democratically elected representatives of our community, making clear that these sentiments and this movement is not a movement for the people we represent here in the ACT. It is not a march for the diverse cultures that make up our community.

The March for Australia website goes on to claim:

This march is a stand for the people, culture, and nation that shaped Australia—and for the right of Australians to determine the future of their own country.

I think we can all work out which people, culture and nation the organisation is referring to as having “shaped Australia”. Frankly, it is people like me and many of us in this room: white Australians; people of British heritage. It is a culture of colonisation and it harks back to the White Australia policy in the way that it is discussed by March for Australia.

I can agree with one element of these sentiments, however—that Australians should determine the future of their own country. That is what our democratic processes are designed to enable, peacefully. Australia has one of the strongest democracies in the world: compulsory attendance at a polling place, preferential voting, independent oversight of elections, and independent determination of electoral boundaries. As an Australian, I am proud of this. Indeed, I am proud of many things that make Australia what it is.

I honour the fact that our nation is home to the oldest living culture on earth and feel privileged that Australia's First Nations peoples share their cultures to strengthen Australia as a nation. I am saddened that the majority of Australians did not support the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to have a voice embedded in our Constitution, but I recognise this question was at least decided peacefully, if in the troubling context of racism, misinformation and disinformation. I am shocked that a bomb was thrown into the crowd at a march in Perth to recognise 26 January as Survival Day, otherwise known as Invasion Day or Sovereignty Day. It was an attack on First Nations people and their supporters gathered in an attempt to influence the future of their nation through peaceful protest.

I am proud of Australia's success over recent decades in building a tolerant, diverse society where the vast majority of Australians value this strength of diversity. Modern Australia has always been a migrant country. Most Australians can trace their family back to a ship or a plane that brought them here. For many, if they are not a migrant themselves, they are only one or two generations removed from their migrant ancestors.

The people who shaped Australia are migrants from all over the world.

The Scanlon Foundation Research Institute's Mapping Social Cohesion study surveyed 8,000 adults in 2025 to measure attitudes towards migration and migrants. It found that 83 per cent of Australians agree multiculturalism has been good for Australia, and 67 per cent agreed that accepting immigrants from many different countries makes Australia stronger. While the study found that 51 per cent of Australians are now concerned about migration levels, even among this cohort 71 per cent still say multiculturalism has been good for Australia. I agree.

We can have a legitimate policy debate about migration as an input to the economy, just as we do about interest rates, employment rates, government debt and any other number on a budget paper. We do have that debate, and we have seen net overseas migration fall from its post-COVID peak, but we cannot let legitimate housing or infrastructure policy debates become a way for hate groups to launder their message into mainstream Australian discourse.

We must, of course, recognise and acknowledge that the history of Australian migration is inextricably intertwined with the dispossession of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, but the March for Australia events occurring in many capital cities were occurring alongside Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and their allies organising peaceful events to make that case. Indeed, it would seem that the language used by the organisers of March for Australia events are intended as a rebuttal to those marches. This is what they mean by references to "redefining what Australia Day represents" and "movements that set Australians against one another". But that is not the intention of those marches for Invasion Day, Sovereignty Day, Survival Day. The purpose of the march, and quoting Paul Silva, an organiser of the march in Sydney, was stated as "recognising the inhumane treatment upon First Nations people". He said:

... many non Indigenous people and people of British descent say that their ancestors were treated inhumanely as well.

So it's more of coming together as a collective, recognising the system both treated both individuals inhumanely and ensuring that the history doesn't carry on.

Australia is a proud multicultural nation. We see that pride through the thousands of Australians already descending on our city to celebrate the food, the dance, the song, the dress and the languages of our community at the National Multicultural Festival this weekend.

I know there has been a flurry of amendments, but I hope that we can all agree that racism, antisemitism, Islamophobia and discrimination of any kind on the basis of race or religion have no place in our community. And I hope this weekend we will gather together in solidarity.

MR EMERSON (Kurrajong) (5.39): I would like to start by thanking the minister for bringing this motion to the Assembly today. While I have some minor reservations with the drafting of the original motion, specifically about agreeing to the introduction of legislation without a prior discussion or briefing on the content or nature of that legislation, the intent was clearly good. I think that, in the context of recent events, including the devastating, evil terror event in Bondi, the March for Australia rallies and

the attempted bombing at the Invasion Day rally in Perth, which has now officially been declared a terror event, it is important for our community to see the politicians who represent them coming together from across the aisle in the spirit of unity, tolerance and, crucially, collective condemnation for violence and hatred, no matter where or whom it is coming from. If we cannot do that, how should we expect others to? I believe, or at least hope, that it is everyone's goal here. I am not sure if we are going to achieve it, based on the number of amendments before us.

It is odd, even to me, notwithstanding my usual fondness for amendments, that we have so many. Surely we should collectively have no qualms with condemning hatred, division and violence in all forms at all times. It should not be about who can condemn with the most condemnation and with the most appropriate words. When terrorists divide us, they succeed. We cannot give them that in the face of these kinds of events. Equally, we need to be careful to protect the right to protest, which must include the right to peaceful protest, for those with whom we disagree. I think Ms Barry's amendment hits the nail on its head in this respect. It says:

... unanimously condemn the rise in racism and violence being played out during public demonstrations, and the increase in racially and religiously motivated violence against individuals, communities, community organisations and community facilities ...

And:

... that there is broad consensus that there needs to be an appropriate balance between the right to express an opinion, including the right to peacefully protest, and the importance of ensuring there are appropriate protections in place to ensure that freedom of expression is not abused ...

If we can all agree on this, I think we are in a pretty good place. I for one feel fortunate to live in a city where I think that is the case. Ultimately, I do not really have any major issues with any of the works that were being asked to vote on among the different amendments here, and, frankly, I would be surprised if anyone in the chamber really did in the final analysis.

I thank members for their work on this motion and again thank the minister for bringing it to the Assembly. On the process, I will never again accept any criticism that I move too many amendments. I have been chuckling with my team—it is hard not to—that this might be a glimpse into what a Liberal-Greens coalition could look like, with the number of amendments we have before us. And I empathise with Ms Carrick, who has vacated the chamber, on the basis of how many different amendments have been moved. It is serious subject matter, but it is strange that this is where we have got to with the process. We will see how we go with the Russian doll of amendments. I will vote how pretty much everyone will vote, I assume.

An amendment before us is Mr Braddock's amendment: amending "Invasion Day" and replacing it with "Survival Day". I will not be voting in support of that one. My team today contacted one of the organisers of the event—a young First Nations woman, Roxanne Moore. She said it is called "Invasion Day".

MS CHEYNE (Ginninderra—Manager of Government Business, Attorney-General,

Minister for Human Rights, Minister for City and Government Services and Minister for the Night-Time Economy) (5.43): I do not intend to speak for long. For me and perhaps for the benefit of everyone, if someone could nod to me about whether it is intended that 3(a), (b) and (c) in Ms Barry's amendment are going through or not, that would help me with what I am going to say next. Anyone involved in the negotiations, if you could—

MR SPEAKER: I do not think we normally indicate across the floor, Ms Cheyne. I think that—

Mr Pettersson: Regarding 3(a), that is still attached to the—

MS CHEYNE: Thank you. Could I clarify, Mr Speaker. I reflect that this morning we had the ambulance roster motion in executive business. There was an error that we corrected, which was perfectly fine. As I think we have all pointed out, this sort of stuff on the fly can also create errors. There are some asks in this that I am certainly not opposed to, but I think some of the language of the drafting could be this or could be that. Sorry, Hansard, that does not help. How you interpret it could be very narrow or it could be very wide.

As the responsible minister for the legislation that ultimately is affected by the calls-on in Ms Barry's amendment, for everyone's benefit I wish to clarify how I will be interpreting it. If you do not like that, now is the time to tell me. I hope I can explain why, so that, if we do have to get back to a "did Labor do the thing that we called on it to do or not", perhaps we can at least revisit this speech and see what the thinking was at the time. I certainly am not opposed to any of these amendments, but, in terms of 3(a) and the review of the Discrimination Act, the way that I am interpreting it is as intended—that this is not a wholesale review of the Discrimination Act. If it were, I would ask everyone to very carefully think about whether that is actually what they meant. I assume it is not.

Ms Barry: You have: "as it relates to hate".

MS CHEYNE: Yes. This is just for clarification for everyone. Also, it is a "Frankenstein motion". Something might change something. If it is about the work that we have announced we are going to do on hate crime and anti-vilification, and that is what we are looking at reviewing as part of that, and it is that narrow, that is great. Absolutely, we will check out what New South Wales is adopting or considering adopting. I certainly already made that clear to the New South Wales Attorney-General, Michael Daley, when we had the joint meeting of Attorneys-General and police ministers in early January.

There is the bit about ensuring that all members of the Assembly are consulted at the drafting stage of any potential legislative reform process. Again, I have absolutely no issue with that. I very much understand the intent. We want to make sure we get legislation that unites rather than divides. That is perfectly reasonable. I wish to clarify that my interpretation of that is that there is early engagement before we look at introducing or debating anything, rather than all sitting around a table and drafting together with the PCO. I think that would break me!

Mr Cocks: It could be fun.

MS CHEYNE: Not for them, and I wish to protect them from that. As long as that is clear, the government can go away and do the work, but then let's all look at it together and work on it together and try to present something as united as possible. That would be great. Then we can aspire to achieve unanimous support. Obviously, the government can aspire to achieve that. Whether it comes off or not remains to be seen—it is up to the Assembly—but I certainly think that there is nothing wrong with aspiring. If that is how it is intended to be, that is great—narrow and what we were already going to do. That would be terrific, thank you. If it is anything more than that, could you please come and talk to me?

Mr Braddock: On a point of order, Mr Speaker: regarding what Mr Emerson said in terms of the name of the rally in Perth, I was operating on publicly available information, which indicated “Survival Day” was the appropriate name. Regarding the fact that Mr Emerson and a staff member have checked with the organisers of that rally, and from what I understand, it is actually “Invasion Day”, so I wish to withdraw that particular amendment, if that would help people.

MR SPEAKER: You will need to seek leave to withdraw that amendment, Mr Braddock.

MR BRADDOCK (Yerrabi) (5.49), by leave, I withdraw my amendment to Mr Pettersson's amendment to Ms Barry's amendment.

MR SPEAKER: Mr Braddock's amendment is withdrawn.

MS BARRY (Ginninderra) (5.50), by leave: I move the following amendment to Mr Pettersson's amendment to my amendment:

In paragraph (4), add “and to condemn antisemitism”.

As has been reflected in the debates, this is a very sensitive topic to all of us here in this chamber. I had hoped that we would not get down to some of the emotions, I guess, that have come through this debate, but I want to address some of the assertions that have been made in this place—that we have any problem calling out hate speech. That is not true. The Canberra Liberals and I particularly have no issues calling out hate speech. The problem that we had with this was that, in my view, it was finger-pointing.

It is also very rich for there to be an assertion that something makes me or my children safe. There is nobody in this chamber who would have experienced racism like I or my children have, so it is actually very rich to say that this is how you address racism, when I am saying that finger-pointing does not make me or my kids safe. You erode the social fabric and you erode the social cohesion that binds us together when you do that. As a government and as elected representatives, it is our responsibility to call it all out, at all times—not just some things; not just being selective. We need to call it all out, at all times.

MR BRADDOCK (Yerrabi) (5.53), by leave, I move the following amendment to

Ms Barry's amendment to Mr Pettersson's amendment to Ms Barry's amendment:

After "antisemitism", add: "and Islamophobia".

Particularly in light of the events at Bondi and what we have seen, we definitely need to call out antisemitism, but, at the same time we also need to call out the rise of Islamophobia. We have seen, as a result of those events, that there have been more instances of racism against that particular group. As I said in my earlier speech, we cannot break this down into silos; we need to understand that hate against any one particular group is hate against all of us.

MR PARTON (Brindabella) (5.54): I will be brief. Can we not do this again? Can we please collaborate earlier on these things and not have such an absurd debate as the one that we are having today? I want to mention that Mr Pettersson has condemned members for seeking to remove a clause. I know that we are putting it back in, but he condemned members for removing a clause that states:

... a bomb was thrown into a peaceful "Invasion Day" rally in Perth on 26 January 2026 in what authorities have declared to be a terrorist attack ...

Mr Pettersson has condemned members. He has condemned me for seeking to remove that clause, asserting that I am somehow heartless or turning a blind eye. I want to point out that I am the only member of this Assembly with Aboriginal heritage and that, as a descendant of the Noongar people of WA, this was an attack on my mob.

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) (5.55): I thank all members for their contributions today. While this has been a touch more procedurally complex than I suspect many of us sought, I am heartened that it appears that this Assembly will unanimously agree to condemn March for Australia. That is very important and it keeps us in line with the previous resolution of this Assembly. The escalation in violence, racism and white supremacism that we have seen recently, including through the inflammatory rhetoric at March for Australia rallies, is deeply concerning. I believe that, fundamentally, it is important for it to be called out, and I will continue to do that.

I appreciate Mr Parton's contribution just then. If that is the way he has interpreted my statements today, I profoundly apologise because that is not what I suggested and it is not what I would have intended to suggest. What I am seeking to do here today is call out March for Australia, and I want us to do that together because there is a terrifying trend happening in this country, where open vitriolic racism and white supremacism is taking root. It is scary and dangerous. As elected representatives, we all have a duty to stand up and call it out when we see unacceptable behaviour in our community—every time and without exceptions. I do not think it is right to pick the groups you like and the groups you do not like. You need to call it out for everyone. That is what I will always strive to do.

In closing, I would like to say once again that today's debate has focused on the unacceptable conduct and behaviour of a small few—it is a small few—and they do not represent us. Canberrans are overwhelmingly welcoming and inclusive. They love and

celebrate our multiculturalism.

Mr Braddock's amendment to **Ms Barry's** amendment to **Mr Petterson's** amendment to **Ms Barry's** proposed amendment agreed to.

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

Mr Pettersson's amendment, as amended, agreed to.

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

Original question, as amended, resolved in the affirmative.

Statements by members

Tourism—Garema Place Hotel

MR BARR (Kurrajong—Chief Minister, Minister for Economic Development and Minister for Tourism and Trade) (5.59): Last month I had the opportunity to celebrate the topping-out of construction on the Crystalbrook Aurora hotel in Garema Place. This project will give Canberra a new destination hotel. It will provide an important addition to our commercial accommodation offering and provides a strong incentive for a new investment in the surrounding precinct and in the city more broadly. The project is also perfectly timed to align with the modernisation of the CBD and other key infrastructure projects, including the new Lyric Theatre, the light rail extension and the UNSW Canberra City campus.

Our visitor economy is diverse. People come here for holidays, business, education and to visit family and friends. That diversity creates a resilient industry and supports growth in education, trade, investment and business. A growing tourism sector is a priority for the government, driving economic growth, creating jobs and supporting our lively and prosperous city and region.

I congratulate Crystalbrook, TP Dynamics and all those involved in the project to continue to elevate Canberra's profile as a tourism destination, helping to meet growing demand from both interstate and international visitors. I congratulate everyone involved in the design, planning, construction and delivery of this great new project for Canberra.

Disability—home accessibility accommodations

MR CAIN (Ginninderra) (6.00): I rise to speak about supports for our disabled tenants in Housing ACT properties. Earlier in January, I met with a constituent of mine who lives in Cook—and I say with permission—Ms Elizabeth Walsh. Ms Walsh is a double amputee and obviously relies on a wheelchair. Despite multiple occasional therapy assessments, supporting her requests for essential modifications to safely move around her home, Housing ACT has repeatedly denied many of these requests.

There are four main accessibility accommodations that she is asking for. She is asking for replacement flooring, due to the current carpet floor tiles coming up and creating a trip hazard for her wheelchair. The replacement flooring must be durable enough to withstand the movement and weight of an electric wheelchair to prevent further flooring

failures. She is also asking for a covered patio in the backyard extended with concrete to allow her access to most of the space without the risk of falling; a swinging gate to the front of the house to allow her to feel safe and protected against intruders; and a swing gate for the carport to allow her to safely store her medical equipment.

She is a person with a severe disability, seeking a home that meets her needs, and I call on ACT Housing to act for her benefit.

Arts—Shakespeare by the Lakes

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS (Brindabella) (6.02): Joseph Papp was the founder of New York's Shakespeare in the Park. His philosophy was:

You start with the philosophy that theater is important to people's lives. If you don't believe this, then you might as well give up.

That is a philosophy that the organisers of Shakespeare by the Lakes in Canberra continue to try and emulate, by being bold, vital, festive and free.

I am delighted to note for the Assembly that this February, in a couple of weeks' time, Shakespeare by the Lake 7 will be coming free to Canberra's parks and gardens. It is going to be *The Taming of the Shrew*—done, I think, in a slightly different way to how we would expect it. I am again, as I did last year, inviting all my colleagues to any one of those performances. If you would like some free tickets to some of the free shows, let me know—you will not have to declare them—or you can just turn up and the price will be the same.

We are starting at Tuggeranong on 20 February and will then be at Patrick White Lawns on 21 February. On 22 February 22, we be at Glebe Park and then at Haig Park on 28 February. There are also a couple of paid indoor ticketed performances at Pialligo Estate and the Belconnen Arts Centre. I look forward to seeing you there, everyone.

Mr Michael Harris, ACT Auditor-General—resignation

MR SPEAKER (Mr Hanson) (6.04): Before I call the minister, members I would like to briefly take the opportunity to note that tomorrow we will be farewelling the ACT Auditor-General, Mr Michael Harris, who has been in the role since 2019.

Mr Harris has a long history of service to the territory and his leadership strengthened accountability across government. Before coming to the Audit Office, Michael Harris brought a wealth of experience from the public and private sectors, including as Under-Treasurer and as Chief Executive in the Chief Minister department.

As members would be aware, the ACT Audit Office fulfils an important role in our system of government. It provides a view, independent of government, on the accountability, efficiency and effectiveness of our public sector. Over the past seven years, Michael Harris has overseen more than 70 audit reports, spanning the responsibilities of government alongside extensive work on agencies' financial statements and performance. I thank him for his service and contribution to the ACT and I wish him well for the future.

Tomorrow, we will also swear in the new Auditor-General, Mr Ajay Sharma, who also has a wealth of experience, including serving as the Assistant Auditor-General since 2017. I look forward to welcoming him to this important role. I take the opportunity to thank all of the staff in the ACT Audit Office for their ongoing contribution to the ACT.

Discussion concluded.

Adjournment

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

That the Assembly do now adjourn.

Mr Michael Harris, ACT Auditor-General—resignation

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) (6.05): I wish to speak briefly to echo your comments, Mr Speaker, on behalf of the government. I think Mr Harris has served in the role of Auditor-General with distinction. Six years is a long time and there has been extraordinary change in that time. I think any of us recalling 2019 can think of the breadth of issues and changes.

We have always welcomed the scrutiny of the Auditor-General's office, under the leadership of Mr Harris. We are very pleased to note the appointment of Mr Ajay Sharma, who, as you said, Mr Speaker, comes with an enormous wealth of experience and is also a known quantity to us. We wish him all the best in such an important role.

Tertiary education—costs

MISS NUTTALL (Brindabella) (6.07): I rise to give this incredibly thoughtful speech, written for me a couple of weeks ago, by a wonderful work experience student, Mia. Mia did not mess around on this one. It comes with a reference list that I would be more than happy to provide to anyone who is interested. She wrote:

Years 11 and 12 is a strange transition period where every day every test is spent preparing for the future, whether that is tertiary education or moving straight into a career. Increasingly, monetary reasons are the largest contributing factors behind their financial decision. Many of my peers have rejected pursuing a degree that reflects their passions; instead, opting for degrees that are safer, more economical options. As courses in the social sciences and arts are nine times more expensive than they were 35 years ago—nine times.

As a result, such careers are pushed by carers, mentors and school advisers while others are discarded. In my high school mind, the only viable paths were engineering and medical science, which were very strongly encouraged by my parents. The implication of this is a generation entering fields they are not genuinely invested in, leaving them susceptible to burnout and dissatisfaction with their careers.

Education should not just be a means to an end. It should benefit the students who are paying increasing amounts to institutions, who still manage to underpay their staff, like the University of New South Wales who is, “facing court for having payroll practices so poor they made it next to impossible to work out whether casual academics were underpaid.”

At the very least, universities are obligated to provide a quality of education that matches the hefty fees. This is caused by the lack of government funding, with tuition now making more than half of university funding. This is well above the OECD average. In addition, university management and councils now include major corporations, such as KPMG and PWC, amongst others. This is a clear conflict of interest between maximising personal profit and benefitting society through spreading knowledge.

Rising costs deter participation from students that may have been willing but are no longer able to attend university. They disproportionately affect young people from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, limiting their future employment options and potential class mobility.

For students who manage to finance a tertiary education in Australia, balancing work and studying full time is often necessary. However, even this is not available to international students. Their skillsets are left highly undervalued and limited by 24 hour work weeks. On top of this, international students pay up to 400 per cent more than domestic students.

An article by the Australia Institute in 2024, describes the consequences of a modern university education as hungry, sleep deprived students, loaded with debt. This debt, whether HECS or HELP, typically constrains graduates for the next decade of their life. Individuals with HECS debt are less likely to own a home and achieve a higher socioeconomic status, relative to counterparts who can pay upfront.

Universities were not always geared towards—unintentionally or otherwise—sucking students dry to make a profit. Historically, universities have been cultures of open intellectual inquiry and debate, which have since been “replaced with an institutional stress on performativity rather than actual learning”. Prior to this, Australian tertiary education existed to serve the public. The Whitlam government famously made university free in the 1970s.

Real world examples of this still do exist. In Europe, out of principle, several universities resist full commercialisation to prevent higher education from becoming a luxury. Countries such as Germany offer free or heavily-subsidised degrees, allowing students to choose courses based on interest as well as wider accessibility to all backgrounds.

For this to be possible, Australia needs to take a long, hard look at its higher education system and seriously reconsider if it fulfils its original purpose. Funding is desperately needed. Supporting all students by reducing fees, ensuring they are spent on essential areas like paying staff an adequate amount, and that educational institutions remain separate from corporate interests.

Thank you, Mia. I think that was a great speech.

Planning and development—Hawker—disused tennis courts site

MR CAIN (Ginninderra) (6.11): Yesterday I did what is now going to be called part 1 of my adjournment speech on the Hawker Tennis Centre. I am going to title this speech part 2. The Hawker Tennis Centre at one stage catered for 300 to 400 students a week in tennis—training, playing games and outdoor activity. I think every member here knows what that site has turned into. It is a dumping ground and it is a dangerous place.

I spoke yesterday about a series of questions on notice to the government where we got, “Yes, we know how bad it is. Don’t worry; we are going to do something about it”—that was in 2024—and “We are really concerned.” But guess what? The site stays as it is.

In this part of my coverage of this site, I particularly want to give a shout-out to the wonderful Hawker/Weetangera Neighbourhood Watch Group, a really active and engaged community group. It is very active on social media, and I want to recount some of their observations this year—and it is not very long into this year—about this particular site. Of course, it is not the only thing they talk about in that part of Belconnen. Again, I want to applaud them for their community engagement, activity and concern.

On the first day of this year, they posted a photo of the site, where there was a dumped mattress, a dumped lounge and other household furniture, and people going to the site. This is near very popular soccer grounds, near an internationally-graded softball centre and near a highly dense educational precinct. They presented this and said, “Something should be done about this and something should be done to stop it happening again.”

On 19 January, they provided an overview of their own engagement with the ACT government: that they have reported the dumping, reported graffiti, reported broken fencing and overgrown vegetation and signs of drug use. They were told that it was “not an unclean leasehold” under the Planning Act by officials—I am not sure if those officials actually saw the site—and that it would be subject to a controlled activity given that a development application, as I mentioned yesterday, had expired and no action had been taken to restore the site to its stated use in the lease.

On 20 January, they reported a man hacking into bushes with an axe. I am not quite sure whether that man was cleaning it up or that man was doing something rather threatening. But a man with an axe hacking into bushes is not something we want to see in our community. On 21 January, they reported a fire on the site. I have a picture, if the minister would like—any minister can see this on their posts—a pile of burnt timber on the site that clearly had been on fire.

Earlier this month, they did something, I think, very positive, and it is to do with the petition I am sponsoring. They posted about a very important petition that was brought to me by a resident in that area of Belconnen, and I am just going to read it. This was 3 February:

Members of our community, along with ourselves, have been working tirelessly to shine a light on the long-neglected state of the former Hawker Tennis Centre. After more than a decade of deterioration, vandalism and inaction, local residents and community groups, together with Peter Cain MLA, have taken the next important step by raising a formal petition to the ACT government. The petition is

more than a request about a single site. It speaks to a broader issue, the ongoing failure to enforce lease obligations and use control orders where they are clearly warranted. Hawker deserves better, and so does every Canberra community affected by similar neglect. Reclaiming this space for sport and recreation would deliver enormous benefits for local families, young people and older residents alike.

Thank you, Hawker/Weetangera Neighbourhood Watch Group.

Rent Relief Fund

MR RATTENBURY (Kurrajong) (6.16): Today, Ms Barry informed the Assembly that the legal affairs committee would not be inquiring into the Rent Relief Fund petition. As a member of that committee I support that decision. Members may be surprised because obviously I have taken a great interest in this. But what was evident was that, despite the sheer number of signatures on the petition, this matter has been well prosecuted in the Assembly and we have had an undertaking from the government that they would come forward with a new version—something like it, but not quite it—and we remain to see what that is. At that point, there was a view that, if there is to be a further inquiry, perhaps it would be when we understand the nature of the replacement.

However, I do have very real concerns about the government's progress on the replacement fund that it is committed to establishing by 1 July 2026 and how many people will suffer from its absence until it is reinstated. I understand that Minister Berry has said the government will not establish temporary rent relief until a new scheme commences.

I do observe that the 2026 *Report on government services* from the Productivity Commission, released, on 29 January, the Housing and Homelessness data tables showed that, in 2025, the ACT continued to have the highest proportion of commonwealth rent assistance income units, or households, in rental stress, with 51.2 per cent paying more than 30 per cent of income and 27.1 per cent paying more than 50 per cent of income on rent. Both represent slight increases from the previous year. The data also indicates that the ACT has the highest proportion of lower-income private renter households paying more than 30 per cent of income on housing costs, though these statistics do have a margin of error. It was concerning that, against this backdrop, Minister Berry's ministerial statement setting out her priorities for 2026 did not mention the replacement of the Rent Relief Fund.

I was contacted by a constituent this week—and I will refer to her as Ashleigh, which is not her real name. Ashleigh reached out to ask me to share her story, in case it helps humanise the very real pressure that people are facing and to encourage swifter government action in reinstating the rent relief scheme or its replacement. Ashleigh said that she is rapidly approaching a financial cliff and that she fled family violence with her son, who has additional needs and for whom she is the primary caregiver. Due to court orders, she is required to live in the ACT in an area that she cannot afford to live and without family support.

She is an intensive care unit registered nurse by trade, but is unable to bridge the hospital shift time versus daycare times gap. After she pays rent, and even with child support,

she is left with \$450, which is consumed by insurances, medications and appointments. This devastating sequence struck me from Ashleigh: “If my childcare support is late, I do not eat.” Ashleigh went on to say that next week she will be eligible to withdraw from her superannuation—and I quote—“a yearly habit since fleeing family violence to survive.” She said:

For the first time in my life, in the last three months of the year last year I was unable to service the full fortnightly direct debit for rent on two occasions, paying manual \$550 payments after selling the limited items of property I own.

Ashleigh is completing an application with the help of a community service to hopefully get a priority public housing waitlist listing. She told me:

The reality is my caregiver duties and geographic restriction from informal supports mean that I will never be able to afford to live where I am court ordered to.

Ashleigh expressed her thanks to the Greens for their advocacy on the reinstatement of the Rent Relief Fund. It is stories like this that drive home the real-world impact of such a scheme.

Ashleigh, thank you for your contact. I am really sorry to hear about your experience. I hope that by sharing your story the government is even more motivated than ever to make changes well within its own reach that will see the fund replaced swiftly.

Geoff Buchanan, CARE Financial Counselling—resignation

MR RATTENBURY (Kurrajong) (6.21): On a related note, I would like to thank Geoff Buchanan from CARE Financial, who is leaving his position with CARE next week. Geoff has been a dedicated employee there, and I have been very grateful for his generosity here. His analysis of data, his capacity to distil it and his willingness to share it in order to advocate for his clients and to mobilise systemic changes I will miss, as I am sure other members of the Assembly will.

Queensland is certainly lucky to be getting him, even if it is temporarily, and I hope things go well for Geoff and his family up there. On behalf of myself and my Greens colleagues, and I am sure other members of the Assembly, I thank Geoff for his contribution to the Canberra community and his many efforts of advocacy.

International events—Venezuela

MR BRADDOCK (Yerrabi) (6.21): Today I want to talk about Venezuela—well, not just Venezuela, really. Cuba, Mexico, Colombia, Nicaragua and Panama are all Spanish-speaking countries in the Americas that have been threatened by the Trump regime in the first weeks of this year. There are so many ways in which this is just wrong. There was a lot of militaristic chest-beating about the success of the operation operations in Caracas that resulted in the kidnapping of Nicolas Maduro in violation of international law. Yet the harsh regime he led is still in place and the latest information suggests that the promised release of Venezuelan political prisoners is happening at a snail’s pace.

Meanwhile, the United States is simply stealing Venezuelan oil tankers to line its own—or, perhaps more likely, Trump’s—personal coffers, to starve their next likely target, Cuba, of fuel. Donald Trump has just signed an executive order that permits tariffs on any country that sends oil to Cuba. Some data suggests the island nation will run out of fuel by the end of this month. Mexico is trying to get fuel supplies through, but it is being threatened about it by the US regime. If there is any good news in this, it is limited to the hope that the United States using fossil fuels as blackmail, bargaining chips and threats might encourage the rest of the world to wean itself off the stuff sooner. Australia should certainly do so.

While officials in the Trump administration described Cuba’s government as a “murderous and cruel dictatorship”, they gleefully offshore prisoners to the notorious prison in El Salvador, a country that does not exactly stand out as a beacon of freedom. The laundry list of recent events in the US suggests that Trump and enablers such as Stephen Miller, Robert F Kennedy Jr and Kristi Noem in fact regard “murderous” and “cruel” as aspirational targets on the domestic front.

Let us remind ourselves that Mr Trump was refused a casino licence in Australia in the 1980s due to his mafia connections. Now he is trying to run the whole world like the mob, positioning himself not with traditional allies such as Australia but with mafia thugs such as Vladimir Putin and Viktor Orban. He uses tariffs and military action as threats. He openly accepts thinly camouflaged bribes: a \$75 million vanity movie project for his wife, funded by Jeff Bezos, and an enthusiastic purchase of his family’s brand-new crypto venture by the UAE. His wealth is estimated to have grown by at least \$4 billion since his return to the office a year ago.

Meanwhile, Australia’s silence is complicity. The Albanese government has become so entangled with the US military that it refuses to condemn murder, kleptocracy or piracy. As my federal colleague Senator David Shoebridge has said: “Lawlessness without consequences helps dictators, tyrants and aggressors and places the world on a very dangerous footing.” The ACT Greens stand with the people suffering in Venezuela, with those suffering under autocratic regimes across the world and with people in the United States fighting to hold their increasingly evil government accountable. We also stand with those living here in Canberra, those with connections with Venezuela, those who are worried about friends, family and loved ones in the region—because what happens around the world reverberates far and wide, including on Canberrans.

Mr Michael Harris, ACT Auditor-General—resignation

MR BRADDOCK (Yerrabi) (6.25): I would also just like to take a moment to extend my gratitude to Michael Harris as the outgoing Auditor-General. I have always found his advice and counsel have been very wise and thought through, and was very much appreciated. I would also like to extend a warm welcome to the incoming Auditor-General, Ajay Sharma. I am sorry I will not be able to join the event tomorrow where we farewell Michael and welcome Ajay, but I look forward to a very positive, close working relationship continuing with the Auditor-General.

Mr Michael Harris, ACT Auditor-General—resignation Geoff Buchanan, CARE Financial Counselling—resignation

MS TOUGH (Brindabella) (6.27): I wanted to touch on two things this evening. I wanted to echo your words, Mr Speaker, the words of Minister Cheyne and the words of Mr Braddock in thanking the outgoing Auditor-General Michael Harris and wishing him well for the future. As a member of the Public Accounts and Administration Committee, I have really appreciated Mr Harris's insights, his time and his frankness. So thank you, Mr Harris for your time, your hard work and your engagement. I wish you all the best into the future. I am sorry I cannot attend tomorrow morning, but I really wish him well and thank him for all his time. On that, I want to welcome Mr Ajay Sharma into the role. I am looking forward to working with him as part of the Public Accounts and Administration Committee and as a member of this Assembly going forward.

I would also like to echo the sentiments of Mr Rattenbury, thanking Geoff Buchanan of CARE Financial for all his incredible work and wish him well into the future. I had the pleasure of visiting CARE Financial last week in Turner to meet with Geoff and the team to hear about all the incredible work they are doing supporting Canberrans. We chatted for a good hour or so about all the work that CARE Financial does, hearing what the different teams do, from education to support, and the way that they engage with Canberrans across the community and how helping them in one spot can mean they can actually get in and help them in so many parts of their lives. That transformational work they are doing with Canberrans is just incredible.

So a big thank you to Geoff. I am really going to miss him. I really enjoy engaging with him in committee processes. He always has really insightful evidence to provide to committees and the submissions are always really helpful. I really wish him the best of luck in the future.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

The Assembly adjourned at 6.28 pm until Tuesday, 24 February 2025 at 10 am.

Schedule of amendments

Schedule 1

Territory Records (Executive Records) Amendment Bill 2025

Amendments moved by the Minister for the Public Service

1

Proposed new clause 4A

Page 2, line 14—

insert

4A Section 31B, new definition of *release period*

insert

release period, for a request under section 31D—see section 31FA (1).

2

Clause 7

Proposed new section 31FA (2)

Page 3, line 16—

omit proposed new section 31FA (2), substitute

- (2) The release period for the request is extended by the following:
- (a) any period agreed between the principal officer and the person making the request;
 - (b) any period decided by the principal officer under section 31FAA;
 - (c) any period decided by the ombudsman under section 31FAB.

3

Clause 7

Proposed new section 31FA (4) to (7)

Page 4, line 1—

omit

4

Clause 7

Proposed new sections 31FAA and 31FAB

Page 4, line 17—

insert

31FAA Extension of time by principal officer

- (1) The principal officer may, before the end of the release period for a request, extend the release period for the request by not more than 30 working days if—

- (a) the request involves dealing with a large volume of information; or
 - (b) the request is complex; or
 - (c) the principal officer considers an extension is reasonable in the circumstances.
- (2) The principal officer may extend the release period only once under this section.

31FAB Extension of time by ombudsman

- (1) The principal officer may, before the end of the release period for a request, apply to the ombudsman to extend the release period for the request.
- (2) An application may be made to the ombudsman whether or not the principal officer has extended the release period under section 31FAA.
- (3) The ombudsman may extend the release period for the request if—
- (a) the request involves dealing with a large volume of information; or
 - (b) the request is complex; or
 - (c) the ombudsman considers an extension is reasonable in the circumstances.
- (4) The ombudsman may extend the release period more than once under this section.
- (5) An extension of a release period may be subject to conditions.
- (6) The principal officer may continue to deal with the request for access, including by making a release restraint determination, while the ombudsman considers the principal officer’s application.

5
Clause 7
Proposed new section 31FB (2)
Page 4, line 26—

omit

6
Clause 8
Proposed new section 31HA (1) (a)
Page 5, line 6—

omit

section 31FA

substitute

section 31FAB

 7
Clause 11**Proposed new section 31KA****Page 6, line 22—***insert***31KA Ombudsman may require additional information from applicant or principal officer**

- (1) Before deciding an application under section 31L, the ombudsman may require the applicant or principal officer to give the ombudsman, within a stated time, additional information that the ombudsman reasonably needs to decide the application.
- (2) If the applicant or principal officer fails to comply with the requirement within the stated time, the ombudsman may refuse to consider the application further.
- (3) The review period mentioned in section 31L (7) does not include any time given to the applicant or principal officer to comply with a requirement under this section.

 8
Clause 11**Proposed new section 31L (1) to (3)****Page 7, line 2—***omit proposed new section 31L (1) to (3), substitute*

- (1) The ombudsman must, within the review period for an application for review of a release restraint determination, decide the application by confirming, varying or revoking the determination.
- (2) The review period for an application is extended by the following:
 - (a) any period agreed between the ombudsman and the applicant;
 - (b) any period decided by the ombudsman under subsection (4A).

 9
Clause 11**Proposed new section 31L (4A)****Page 7, line 17—***insert*

- (4A) The ombudsman may, before the end of the review period for the application, extend the review period by not more than 30 working days if—
 - (a) the request involves dealing with a large volume of information; or
 - (b) the request is complex; or
 - (c) the ombudsman considers an extension is reasonable in the circumstances.

10
Clause 11
Proposed new section 31L (6)
Page 7, line 22—

omit

subsection (3)

substitute

subsection (2)

11
Clause 11
Proposed new section 31L (7), new definition of *review period*
Page 7, line 25—

insert

review period, for an application for review of a release restraint determination, means the period ending 30 working days after the later of the following:

- (a) the day the ombudsman receives the application;
- (b) the day the ombudsman is given access to the relevant accessible executive record.

Note The ombudsman is entitled to access a relevant accessible executive record when exercising a function under this Act (see s 31HA (2)).

12
Proposed new clause 11A
Page 8, line 11—

insert

11A **New part 7**

insert

Part 7 **Transitional—Territory Records (Executive Records) Amendment Act 2025**

58 **Meaning of *commencement day*—pt 7**

In this part:

commencement day means the day the *Territory Records (Executive Records) Amendment Act 2025*, section 3 commences.

59 Requests for access to accessible executive records made before commencement day

- (1) This section applies to a request for access to an accessible executive record under section 31D made but not finally dealt with before the commencement day.
- (2) Part 3A, as in force immediately before the commencement day, continues to apply in relation to the request.
- (3) The principal officer must, before Canberra Day in 2027, deal with the request under sections 31E to 31G and section 31I, as in force immediately before the commencement day.

60 Requests for access to accessible executive records made on or after commencement day and before 1 July 2026

- (1) This section applies to a request for access to an accessible executive record (the *record*) under section 31D made by a person on or after the commencement day and before 1 July 2026.
- (2) Part 3A, as in force immediately before the commencement day, continues to apply in relation to the request, subject to subsections (3) to (7).
- (3) If the principal officer is required under section 31E or section 31F, as in force immediately before the commencement day, to give the person a copy of the record, or part of the record, as soon as practicable after receiving the request, the principal officer must give the person the record, or the part of the record, within 30 working days after the day the officer receives the request (the *release period*).
- (4) The release period for the request is extended by the following:
 - (a) any period agreed between the principal officer and the person;
 - (b) any period decided by the principal officer under subsection (5).
- (5) The principal officer may, before the end of the release period for the request, extend the release period by not more than 30 working days if—
 - (a) the request involves dealing with a large volume of information; or
 - (b) the request is complex; or
 - (c) the principal officer considers an extension is reasonable in the circumstances.
- (6) The principal officer may extend the release period for the request only once under subsection (5).
- (7) If the principal officer does not give the person the record, or the part of the record, within the release period (including any extension under subsection (4)), the principal officer is taken to have made, at the end of the release period, a release restraint determination that the requested record is not to be released at all.

61 Expiry—pt 7

This part expires on the day after Canberra Day in 2027.

Note A transitional provision is repealed on its expiry but continues to have effect after its repeal (see Legislation Act, s 88).

13 Proposed new clauses 13 to 15
Page 8, line 15—

insert

13 Dictionary, new definition of *executive record*

insert

executive record, for part 3A (Executive records—access and release)—see section 31B.

14 Dictionary, definition of *principal officer*

substitute

principal officer—

- (a) for this Act generally—see section 8; and
- (b) for part 3A (Executive records—access and release)—see section 31B.

15 Dictionary, new definition of *release period*

insert

release period, for a request under section 31D, for part 3A (Executive records—access and release)—see section 31FA (1).
