



DEBATES
OF THE
LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
FOR THE
AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

DAILY HANSARD

Edited proof transcript

19 March 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 **Thursday, 9 April 2026**.

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Thursday, 19 March 2026

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

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

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.

Nurses, midwives and nurse practitioners Ministerial statement

MS STEPHEN-SMITH (Kurrajong—Minister for Health, Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Finance and Minister for the Public Service) (10.02): I rise this morning to outline how the ACT government is achieving key outcomes for the ACT nursing workforce through investment and delivery of forward-thinking policy, strategy and legislative reforms that have marked the ACT as leaders across the nation.

Last week I was invited to deliver a keynote address to the Australian College of Nursing's 9th National Policy Summit for national leaders in nursing policy. The theme of the summit was "Nurse Retention: Transition of Practice". This could not be more timely, more urgent, or more central to the strength of Australia's health system. I am pleased to say that the ACT government's forward-thinking policy agenda was not simply a topic of discussion but highlighted as a blueprint for action for other Australian jurisdictions.

Nationally and internationally, nurses and midwives work at every touchpoint of care across public health systems, forming the backbone of quality, accessibility and continuity of health care. Nurse and nurse practitioner roles span every part of the system and the expertise they bring is essential to delivering safe, responsive and person-centred care. Transition points offer moments of significant opportunity, growth and long-term professional fulfilment.

When these transitions are well-supported, they inspire confidence, strengthen capability and foster sustained, rewarding careers. These include the shift from student to graduate practitioner, moving from one clinical specialty to another and growing into advanced clinical roles and work in academia, research, policy and education. Nurses also navigate transitions associated with relocating across jurisdictions and potentially between countries. Later, they may be preparing for their late career phase and retirement from clinical practice, which can be a time to engage differently with education, mentoring and roles in professional organisations.

The Australian College of Nursing's theme of "Transition of Practice" speaks directly to this, because when nurses are supported at every stage of their journey they stay, they grow and they lead. This is exactly what the ACT government seeks to cultivate through our policies—a system where nurses can move confidently into new roles, work to their full scope of practice and contribute at every level, from the bedside to the boardroom. Our commitments—whether in nurse-led models of care, legislative reform or safe and supportive workplaces—are designed to build a workforce that is retained not by a sense of obligation, but by opportunity, respect and the ability to shape the future of health care.

As I outlined in my ministerial statement on primary care on 26 February, I will again touch on the role of the Walk-in Centres as a key investment in nurse-led models of care. In 2010 the ACT Labor government made its first investment in nurse-led models of care for minor injuries and illness through the establishment of a Walk-in-Centre, the first nurse-led Walk-in Centre of its kind in Australia. Now the five WiCs have become a cornerstone of accessible, free care, demonstrating the capability and leadership of ACT nurses. As we are all aware in this place, the network includes Belconnen, Tuggeranong, the Inner North, Weston Creek and Gungahlin, delivering care close to home, 365 days a year, 7.30 am to 10 pm.

The ACT WiCs demonstrate the strength, capability and leadership inherent in the nursing profession and create environments where nurses are empowered to truly flourish. WiCs are a statement of the Barr Labor government's enduring confidence in the advanced clinical skills, professionalism and leadership of our nurses. Advanced practice nurses are enabled to work at extended scope after receiving in-depth training and successfully completing the required exams. Together with nurse practitioners, these experienced nursing clinicians are supported by a suite of medication standing orders and clinical treatment protocols, enabling them to provide clinically appropriate care and medications while demonstrating operational autonomy within these protocols.

From 1 July to 31 October 2025 our five WiCs recorded more than 44,300 presentations, compared with just under 59,600 across our two emergency departments combined in the same period. Monthly, WiCs see 10,000 to 12,000 patients, and activity continues to grow. Nurse-led models enable nurses to contribute beyond clinical care as well, including in service planning, quality improvement, workflow design and operational processes and protocols. This broad scope enables nurses to develop business and management capabilities alongside clinical expertise.

Transitioning into roles such as clinical leadership, policy development or health system and health service planning allows nurses to shape contemporary clinical operations, workforce models and service delivery. With nurses in management and leadership positions, clinical insight directly informs operational decisions, improving patient outcomes, enhancing efficiency and supporting models of care that respond to community needs.

The ACT government continues to lead the nation in policy that enables nurses to work to their full scope of practice. On 25 February 2026, this place passed the nation-leading

Nurse Practitioners Legislation Amendment Act 2025, supporting our strategy to enhance person-centred care, particularly in palliative and aged care settings, and professional autonomy into our health system and health workforce. From September 2026, under the act, ACT nurse practitioners will be able to issue a cause of death certificate in certain circumstances or witness a non-written health direction, no longer requiring them to seek a medical practitioner to fulfil that function.

Like the Voluntary Assisted Dying Act 2024 these reforms seek to create a seamless care journey for the community and our clinicians. Under the Voluntary Assisted Dying Act nurse practitioners can undertake the role of coordinating practitioner and consulting practitioner to determine if an individual is eligible to access voluntary assisted dying. Nurse practitioners can walk alongside an individual right through the voluntary assisted dying process. These reforms honour the right of Canberrans to die with dignity, whether by voluntary assisted dying, from natural causes or in a palliative care hospice.

These changes dismantle outdated clinical barriers to practice, in line with the Unleashing the Potential of our Health Workforce—Scope of Practice Review, which called for all health professionals to be able to work to their full scope of practice. By formally recognising the advanced expertise and scope of practice of nurse practitioners, we are empowering them to see a person’s care through to completion. Of course, it is not intended for nurse practitioners to replace the role of the medical practitioner. Rather, these reforms seek to increase timely access to health care by enabling a complementary and interdisciplinary approach to provide the right care at the right time for the ACT community.

This policy work will only be effective if our staff feel safe, supported and valued in their working environment. Since 2018, the ACT government has implemented the Nurses and Midwives: Towards a Safer Culture Strategy in partnership with the Australian Nursing and Midwifery Federation ACT Branch. This is a long-term commitment to address the psychosocial risks and hazards that are, unfortunately, prevalent in modern healthcare. Three of the many effective strategies of the overall TASC Strategy are the implementation of the Safewards model of care, the Clinical Supervision Framework for ACT Nurses and Midwives, and the launch of the “Be kind and respectful to our nurses and midwives” community awareness campaign.

The Safewards model is an evidence-based framework designed to reduce conflict and containment. By focusing on the relationship between staff and patients, Safewards proactively addresses the triggers that lead to restrictive practices and occupational violence. Originally designed for mental health settings, the ACT has successfully adapted and scaled this model to 18 inpatient services across mental health, medical and rehabilitation inpatient units, including the entirety of the University of Canberra Hospital, and our understanding is that it is the only hospital in the world where Safewards is applied across the entire organisation. Under the TASC Strategy, the team has trained more than 450 Safewards champions to sustain this positive cultural change.

The Clinical Supervision Framework is designed to enhance nurse and midwife wellbeing by providing a formal, structured, non-managerial space for reflection and support. By offering a confidential, protected environment to process the demands of the work environment, this initiative aims to reduce burnout and improve staff retention.

To date the ACT has trained 196 staff to deliver interdisciplinary clinical supervision.

The Be Kind campaign expansion into the “Aggression or violence. It is not part of the job” whole-of-government initiative broadens the safety messages to all public-facing ACT government workers—across health care, transport, education, Access Canberra, emergency services and others. The key message of this campaign emphasises that violence is never okay and that all workers deserve a safe workplace. Explicitly acknowledging the risk of occupational violence also helps to create a culture of reporting.

The Barr Labor government has reached a significant milestone in its long-term plan to improve patient care and working conditions with the completion of the implementation of mandated minimum nurse and midwife to patient ratios across all ACT public health inpatient areas. The ACT government has fulfilled our commitment to invest more than \$137 million, which has seen 227 full time equivalent nurses and midwives join our ACT public health services. Under the ratio staffing model, across every shift, each clinical unit will have a balanced skill mix of staff, a minimum ratio of nurses or midwives, depending on the inpatient area, and additional supernumerary resources to support patients and staff based on the complexity of the unit.

Together, these initiatives reflect the ACT government’s commitment to nurture careers, strengthen capability and ensure our nurses and midwives are supported at every stage of their professional journey. The ACT government will continue this work to build a future where nurses are not only integral to health service delivery but central to shaping the system.

The outcome of last week’s Australian College of Nursing Policy Summit will no doubt help to guide national priorities in workforce planning, education pathways and transition support. The ACT’s examples, from nurse-led Walk-in Centres to legislative reforms, health and wellbeing and safe staffing strategies, demonstrated on a national stage what is achievable when nurses are empowered to lead.

In presenting today on what is being achieved by and for nurses in the ACT, I recognise there will always be more we can do. I will continue to advocate for policy reform that enables all health professionals to work to their full scope of practice and meets the evolving healthcare needs of the ACT community.

I present the following paper:

Update on ACT nursing workforce reforms and supports—Ministerial statement,
19 March 2026.

I move:

That the Assembly take note of the paper.

MR PARTON (Brindabella—Leader of the Opposition) (10.13): I stand to respond to the statement from the Minister for Health as the shadow health minister. I wanted to focus more on the things that were not in the statement rather than the things that were. The minister has described us in this space as a national leader and a blueprint for action,

but there are no independent benchmarks or comparative data or evaluations that are provided. There is a reference to the Australian College of Nursing summit, and that reflects, I think, visibility rather than validation.

I wanted to talk about activity versus outcomes. The Walk-in Centre data—we are talking 44,300 presentations—is used to imply success. However, there is no evidence of reduced ED wait times as a direct result of the introduction of the Walk-in Centres, and no patient outcome data. There is no cost-effectiveness analysis. In the ministerial statement, nurse-led care is framed as transformative, but I did want to point out that it operates within strict protocols, dependent on medical escalation pathways. It still, of course, relies on medical oversight and there is mixed evidence on reducing system pressure. The narrative overstates autonomy and system impact in our view.

The retention problem is not addressed at its core. The speech focused on career pathways and leadership, but the evidence shows that nurses leave due to workload and burnout, staffing pressures and poor culture. Cultural and professional initiatives do not resolve those structural drivers. We heard about investment, \$137 million and 227 staff were highlighted, but what is missing is whether the ratios are consistently achieved. What is missing is the impact on burnout, retention or safety. Implementation is presented as success, but there is not a great deal of proof of effect.

Programs like Safewards and awareness campaigns are positive but would appear limited. Violence is driven by system strain, not just behaviour. The campaigns have weak evidence of impact and these risk addressing symptoms rather than causes. There is no acknowledgement of trade-offs or risks. The speech omits cost and sustainability. It omits the impact on general practice, potential system fragmentation and we just think as a consequence that it is a little one-sided.

None of these criticisms diminish the essential role that nurses and midwives play in the health system because they are the backbone of care delivery. On that front we are certainly in bold agreement with the minister that they present at every stage of the patient journey and that they are central to quality, safety and continuity. It is critical that policy not only recognises this but genuinely listens to the workforce, and the Canberra Liberals do not have confidence in the Labor government to do this.

Ongoing engagement, including formal reviews and legislative processes, provide an opportunity to ensure reforms reflect the realities that nurses face on the ground. The Canberra Liberals are paying close attention to ensure that these initiatives—and we know that if they are done well they can help align policy intent with lived experience—ensure that investment, workforce design and scope of practice changes truly support nurses to remain in the profession and deliver high quality care.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Public schools—infrastructure—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) (10.16): On

behalf of Minister Berry, I rise today to give the Assembly an update on a number of infrastructure projects underway across the public school system. Each year, the ACT government invests in upgrades, small and large, across our system. These investments ensure that every classroom, in every school, is a great space to learn in and to teach in.

Kurrajong members will be particularly excited to hear that the upgrade works at Narrabundah College have reached the halfway point. That project is building a new design, arts, technology and science building and other upgrades, which will deliver contemporary, high quality learning facilities for inner south students and staff. In Minister Berry's own electorate, she is proud that Strathnairn School opened at the start of the year.

The next school to open will be the new primary school in Whitlam next year, which is in my electorate, and which will cater for up to 780 students in the growing Molonglo Valley. Stage 1 of construction is progressing well, with the crane "Principal Lifterson", named by a student, now hard at work on site. Importantly, the school has a co-located, 130-place early childhood education and care service, expected to open later next year. That component of the project has a \$10 million funding contribution from the commonwealth government and is a great example of Labor governments working together to create outcomes for children and their families. I cannot wait to see the school and the early learning centre up and running.

The government is also working on a second public college for Gungahlin, to be built in Nicholls before the end of the decade. The new college will take pressure off Gungahlin College and provide young people in Canberra's north world-class facilities to finish their school education. Infrastructure Canberra is currently considering how community feedback from the development application process will feed into the final design.

Back on the southside, stage 1 of the major modernisation at Garran Primary School is now complete, with students enjoying new classrooms, specialist learning areas and an upgraded preschool. Ms Berry has loved receiving positive feedback from students, families and staff. The library is particularly popular, with its round windows, reclaimed Canberra red bricks and quiet acoustics. The next stage will see a double gymnasium, admin spaces and more outdoor spaces by the end of 2026.

Another important project for the southside is the planned expansion of the senior campus of Telopea Park School. The project will see new specialist classrooms, a new multipurpose hall and double gymnasium which will benefit the school and wider community. The Major Plan Amendment for this project is open for public comment until the end of this month. We encourage people to have their say.

These are just some of the projects that are part of ACT Labor's plan for Canberra's public education system. We are building for the future. Every new school and every modernised classroom is an investment in our community. We are planning for growth, improving learning environments and ensuring our schools remain places where students feel safe, supported and inspired to learn. This is one of the biggest upgrades to public education in the territory's history and it is all about giving students the best possible start.

I present the following paper:

Public School Infrastructure Update—Ministerial statement, 19 March 2026.

I move:

That the Assembly take note of the paper.

MS LEE (Kurrajong) (10.21): I thank Minister Paterson for delivering the statement on behalf of the Minister for Education. Once again, we see a ministerial statement that is actually more telling about what it does not contain than what it does. It is all good for the minister to be saying, “Hey, Kurrajong members, you should be happy—because look what is happening in Narrabundah.” But, of course, what it does not address is the absolute debacle that we have seen with this Labor government’s handling of the Lyneham gymnasium project, which has been the subject of an Assembly inquiry and some pretty less than ordinary findings by the multi-member committee itself.

The minister claims that the ACT Labor government is “building for the future” and that they are “planning for growth and improving learning environments and ensuring our schools remain places where students feel safe, supported and inspired to learn.” What a slap in the face to the school communities at not just Lyneham but also Majura, in my electorate, who are basically told, “Guys, we are going to have some growth, so we came up with all these grand plans and made all these promises—but, yeah, nah, you are not going to get it.” This is a slap in the face to people in my electorate—the students, the parents, the school leaders and the school communities—who have, in good faith, relied on the promises that were made by this ACT Labor government. Once again, we see that, before an election, it is promising one thing and, after an election, it is a bit of yeah nah. This is a statement that just glosses over all of the issues that have been told to the minister time and time again, arising out of the concerns from the school communities—and, once again, we see that they are being ignored.

Let’s not forget that we are also talking about a government that has overseen the degradation of our government schools to the extent that most schools are having trouble with accessing heating, cooling and even basic toilet facilities. We are talking about schools that are either forcing students to sit there in classrooms with blankets over themselves or having to let the students out and distribute ice blocks because it gets so hot. We are talking about girls who, when that time of the month comes, cannot even use the toilets because they are unhygienic. These are the stories that we have heard from the school communities, who tell us about the lack of attention, care and planning from this ACT Labor government when it comes to planning, infrastructure and maintenance. Not to mention that we have yet to see the findings of Operation Kingfisher, which go directly to the serious allegations that have been levelled about the modernisation project at Campbell Primary School.

When it comes to infrastructure, when it comes to maintenance and when it comes to the modernisation of our public schools, this is a government that has a very, very poor track record. Frankly, the words that the minister has stated in this ministerial statement do not hold water. The Canberra Liberals have always stood up for the school communities and their needs. It is absolutely clear, again from this ministerial statement, that ACT Labor have no intention of following through.

MISS NUTTALL (Brindabella) (10.24): Ms Lee said so many of the other things that I was going to say. That was very cathartic to listen to—so thank you very much. I want to thank the minister for her statement; however, I do fear that the picture that Minister Paterson has painted on Minister Berry’s behalf regarding school infrastructure is not just rosy; I think the roses have taken over the garden a little bit.

We have heard from schools, teachers and students about the inadequacy of their school facilities for so long now. We talked about it with Tuesday’s ministerial statement: kids not being able to access clean, safe toilets—which, mind you, is a basic requirement for human dignity. Buildings, classrooms, heating and cooling systems are so poor or non-existent. Classes are being split and collapsed or cancelled already this year, just two months into the school year. It is why the federal AEU literally launched a federal inquiry into school infrastructure; it is why this Assembly did two inquiries into school infrastructure last term; and it is why we are all still, I think, waiting with bated breaths for the results from the government’s school infrastructure audit—still. I would be really interested in understanding from Minister Berry why those results have not yet been made public.

I am always happy to hear about sensible investments in school infrastructure. I am happy for Kurrajong members and my Narrabundah juniors—shout out “Bundah”. I am happy that the minister’s own electorate of Ginninderra got upgrades, with the Strathnairn school, which was genuinely needed. As a Telopea graduate, I am glad to hear that Telopea is getting a good investment. But, from my memory, as I went through year 7s to 10, we were still able to hold years 7 to 10 assemblies comfortably in our school hall, which, from memory, was separate from our school gym. It is a shame that other Kurrajong students in Lyneham are not getting the same experience from our world-class education system. You know why? Three for three: I hear my old Garran Primary School, is getting a new hall again or a gymnasium. I believe the last one was completed when I was graduating year 6—so really not that long ago.

I am talking about myself a lot; I am sorry. But I had the economic and social privilege of being able to go to school in the Parliamentary Triangle, where resources tended to concentrate, despite living in Tuggeranong. I had the best time. I am so proud of my public education. But it is a growing point of shame for me that I did not stick it out at a local primary school, because government resources tend to concentrate closer to Lake Burley Griffin than they do to Lake Tuggeranong. That is not a blanket statement; I think there is a lot happening in the inner north. Here is the thing: all the people I tend to talk to down in Tuggeranong—kids, parents, teachers, LSAs and principals—say that their schools are crumbling. There is nothing in this statement for them. I do not want to send out too many strays but I do just wonder how this Labor government’s backbenchers felt reading that ministerial statement.

We have a lot of old infrastructure in Brindabella. We are not growing so fast; so, of course, there is not the same need for new school build, which now tend to be clean, climate controlled, often fully electric and able to provide their occupants with basic human dignity. We know that the biggest problem is aging infrastructure that is genuinely so bad that it has an impact on students’ learning and on educators’ wellbeing. It has an impact on parents’ and carers’ pride in their community, and sometimes I think it drives students towards the private school system and makes the

problem worse. We need to be attracting students to the public system. We are proud of it. We are proud of the people that educate and learn in it. Public education is a fundamental right of every single person that grows up here in Canberra. So it is not acceptable to have classes without proper heating and cooling in our public schools. For there to be kids who cannot focus on learning because they are sweltering in summer, feeling faint and having to go home early, and freezing in winter, to the point that they need to bring blankets into primary schools, is not acceptable. We need the results of a property quality audit. We need more investment in infrastructure in the old schools in Tuggeranong and around the city—and we need that investment now.

MR EMERSON (Kurrajong) (10.29): I welcome the minister's statement this morning and intend to make the same remarks that have been made already, perhaps in a slightly different tone. Across the balance, I think we are covering the same issues. As anticipated in the statement, I am particularly excited about the work happening in my electorate, at Narrabundah College, and am particularly interested in the plans for Telopea, about which my office has been engaging both with the P&C and with some neighbouring residents. I welcome the construction of a co-funded early learning centre, co-founded with commonwealth, that is co-located with the new public primary school in Whitlam. Hopefully, this is one of many in the future pipeline. I know Ms Carrick is particularly passionate about this issue and has spoken about it extensively, as has the minister.

“Building for the future”—as Ms Lee put her finger on—to borrow the minister's phrase, must include, as Miss Nuttall has indicated, upgrading school infrastructure and standards to adapt to the temperatures we are facing now but also to a warmer climate into the future. We already know all public schools should have air conditioning in every classroom, in line with recommendation 29 of the Assembly Inquiry into the Management of ACT School Infrastructure. Other jurisdictions have already done this. They have already provided air conditioning in every single classroom, library and staff room. I believe they did that in Queensland in 2022. Further steps toward extreme heat resilience should also be explored, and I have laid some of these out in my submission into the government's next climate change strategy, including mandating minimum shade levels over school playgrounds and restricting the use of materials like metal surfaces and synthetic turf in playground construction to ensure children are able to access meaningful outdoor recreation as temperatures increase. I really hope to see increased ongoing cross-portfolio work happening in this area with respect to school infrastructure. We know it is a whole-of-government challenge.

It would be remiss of me to speak to the walking back of the expansion of Majura Primary School. Modernisation is great, but the school community, families and the P&C have already made it clear that the school is already too small for the existing student body. So not expanding it is not only not sufficient now but also not a way of planning for the future. While acknowledging budget constraints, my fear is that, if school upgrade decisions are not appropriately forward-looking, we will ultimately end up spending more before long in any case, having upgraded a facility and then modernised it and then expanded it in the near future, with someone else expected to foot that bill. I would also like to mention the need for a double gymnasium at Lyneham High to prepare for the future, as opposed to the promised upgraded single gymnasium, which is also too small to meet the existing needs of the school and broader community, let alone their future needs.

Again, I do welcome the minister's statement this morning and look forward to ongoing work and updates in this area, particularly with respect to Narrabundah College and Telopea Park School. I would also very warmly welcome reconsideration of the infrastructure decisions that have been made that will impact and are impacting families in the inner north, particularly with respect to Majura Primary and Lyneham High.

MS CARRICK (Murrumbidgee) (10.33): I, too, welcome the minister's update on public school infrastructure and acknowledge the significant investments being made across our school system. New schools, modernised classrooms and specialist facilities are clearly improving learning environments for many students. But this statement also highlights a deeper issue we must now address.

At present, school upgrades are largely delivered project by project, often in response to growth pressures or aging facilities. But what we still lack is a clear, system-wide framework that defines what every public school should meet as a minimum standard. Clear standards covering building condition, accessibility, heating and cooling, safety, specialist learning spaces and outdoor areas would give certainty to school communities and transparency to taxpayers about what government considers acceptable for a contemporary learning environment.

Just as importantly, these standards must be supported by a comprehensive audit of all public school infrastructure against them. An audit would allow us to move from reactive upgrades to a planned, evidence-based pipeline of works, prioritised by need, condition and educational impact. I am particularly interested to know what the maintenance needs of the Woden School and Malkara School are, given their recent flooding and closures, and the parents' concerns that their infrastructure needs are being neglected.

This approach would support better long-term budgeting, reduce the risk of sudden failures and ensure equity across the system. If we are serious about building for the future, as the minister has outlined, then setting clear standards and auditing against them and publishing the outcomes is the logical next step.

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS (Brindabella) (10.34): Very quickly, I want to make a couple of comments on the minister's statement. I thank her for letting us know what the government is committing to in public education and giving us an indication of what is coming down the line. I sort of agree in principle with the comments from my colleagues here about the "shoulds", the "musts" and the "coulds". I notice that none of those requests, suggestions and demands were accompanied by how much extra money the government should spend to deliver what is required—noting that the ACT government provides \$1.6 billion, give or take, to education in the ACT. That is about 22 per cent of the ACT's budget. That is a lot. How much extra should the government be spending? What is the number?

Ms Carrick: Lots.

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: How much more? Should it be the equivalent perhaps of how much money Canberra Grammar gets from—

Ms Lee interjecting—

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: Put a number on what is needed. That is really important. What should be spent and what should be spent elsewhere? It is extremely important. I did not go to school in the Parliamentary Triangle; I went to Weston Primary School, Stromlo High and Lake Tuggeranong College. Stromlo High is older than every school in Tuggeranong. It has a really big gym that is also the assembly hall. It was not particularly well heated in the nineties, but it was fine. I have a daughter at a primary school, I have a son at a high school in Tuggeranong and I have a son at a college in Tuggeranong. They are not freezing. They do not need blankets; they never have.

But there are problems and improvements that can be made and need to be made at schools in Tuggeranong. I would suggest that Wanniasa High needs a bit of work. I think Namadgi, which is a very new school—and the community at Namadgi really enjoy what that school offers in terms of infrastructure—is a great example of the extra work that needs to be done. I note Telopea Park is the oldest school in Canberra. It might need a little bit of work, because it is falling down. Narrabundah was built a long, long time ago and has a lot of asbestos.

There is a requirement for work to be done and there are priorities. Decisions need to be made, but not everything can be done everywhere all at once. That is how the budget works. There is a limited amount from the federal government that can be spent. For public schools, that is going to change by 2035. Perhaps some people in the Assembly could suggest that the ACT government reduces the amount of money it spends on government grants to private schools—\$322 million a year. Make that suggestion.

Ms Lee interjecting—

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: If that is where extra money comes from, that is a possibility. The ACT government needs to spend within the envelope. The more money we spend on public schools, the better it is. There will always be more work to do. There will always be more options and requirements to meet to ensure that students get the best educational outcomes in terms of infrastructure, teacher resourcing and student health and engagement. There is always more work to do. The work is being done, and this government will keep doing it.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

ACT Policing—facilities management—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) (10.39): I am pleased to update the Assembly and the Canberra community on the ACT government's progress in delivering on the Assembly resolution of Wednesday, 25 June 2025 regarding the ACT Policing facilities management and improvement.

I want to start by thanking ACT police and our emergency service members for the work they do every single day in keeping our community safe. There have been some

challenges presented at both ACT police facilities in Winchester and City Police Station since the start of the year.

I will start this response by noting the recent damage that occurred at the Winchester Police Centre following the storm on Saturday, 7 March this year. During the storm, ACT SES received more than 70 requests for assistance, mostly related to water leaking through roofs and gutters. Winchester was among the affected sites. Works are underway to rectify the situation in the affected areas, and I want to thank members for their patience through this process.

There was also an issue with the air-conditioning system at City Police Station which caused flooding in the gym. These issues were rectified quickly, and I continue to work closely with ACT Chief Police Officer Scott Lee to ensure the station remains safe and fit for purpose for our officers. The ACT government takes work health and safety obligations very seriously, and we remain committed to providing our frontline responders with the high-quality facilities that they deserve.

The resolution called on the government to reaffirm its commitment to keep Canberrans safe by maintaining and improving police infrastructure, upholding work health and safety requirements and supporting the operational capability of police to keep Canberrans safe; to continue to work on delivering a new headquarters and City Police Station; and to support all ACT Policing members and maintain infrastructure required at Gungahlin, Belconnen, Woden and Tuggeranong police stations.

These commitments are at the heart of our approach. Safe, modern and well-maintained facilities are essential for our police to do their job effectively and for the community to have confidence in their services. That is why we are investing in both new infrastructure and upgrades to existing infrastructure. Work is progressing on a new ACT Policing headquarters and City Police Station. These projects will deliver fit-for-purpose facilities to support our local police now and into the future. These investments are critical to meeting the needs of our growing community and ensuring our police have the resources they need to keep Canberrans safe.

Several procurement model options are currently being considered for this project. They include an integrated public-private partnership model, a traditional design and construct model, and a leased option. On 25 June last year, the ACT government went public, inviting third parties interested in providing property options and solutions to replace City Police Station and Winchester headquarters to respond to the request for expression of interest. The REOI closed on 4 August last year, and the evaluation is complete. This will be used to inform the next stage of planning. The request for expression of interest process indicated there was strong interest in the project from industry. The responses received will be used to inform the business case to be considered to determine next steps.

At the same time, we are also maintaining and upgrading existing stations in Gungahlin, Belconnen, Woden, Tuggeranong and the city. This includes improvements to heating and cooling systems, expanded accommodation and sustainability initiatives such as an electrification project. These upgrades ensure our facilities remain safe, accessible and operationally effective.

The government has committed to building a new police station in the Molonglo Valley and reviewing police servicing in Woden. Work is already underway on a needs and scope analysis to guide these projects, ensuring first responders can continue to meet community expectations for response times as Canberra grows.

Having outlined the purpose and impact of these initiatives, I will now turn to the associated investment required to deliver them. Funding of \$3.6 million was provided to ACT Policing to undertake preventive and reactive maintenance per annum. ACT Policing receives over \$300,000 each year as part of the Asset Renewal Program, funding upgrades or significant improvements to facilities.

In the 2023-24 budget, cabinet agreed to \$3.823 million in recurrent funding over two years for a comprehensive feasibility study and business case for a new ACT Policing headquarters and station, and to assess policing infrastructure needs in Woden and Molonglo. The 2025-26 budget allocated an additional \$1.144 million to fund design work and replacement of infrastructure at city and ACT Policing headquarters at Winchester.

In the 2025-26 budget, cabinet agreed to \$2.5 million in capital funding over two years for a Molonglo town centre delivery strategy. It also noted that the Molonglo Valley police station needs and scope analysis will happen within that money. The 2025-26 budget was allocated \$11 million in capital funding over 2025-26 and 2026-27 to support the delivery of early enabling works to prepare the Casey precinct for future block development, which includes an ESA facility that will ultimately see ESA—Fire & Rescue and ACTAS—move out of the Gungahlin facility. This will become solely a police facility.

The ACT government recognises that, while investments in infrastructure are critical, so are investments in people. We have a growing police force in the ACT. The 2025-26 budget funded over \$112 million to increase wages and support for staff members. In the 2023-24 budget, \$107 million was allocated over five years to recruit and train 126 new police officers. ACT Labor's 2024 election commitment saw the ACT government commit to increase this number to 150 new officers. We are well on our way to delivering this commitment.

In February, I provided an update to the Assembly that 81 recruits joined ACT Policing last year. As recently as last week, we had an additional 19 recruits graduate from the college. I remain committed to working with ACT Policing to continue to deliver on our commitment to grow our police force. These actions reflect a clear and ongoing commitment from the ACT government to support all ACT Policing members, maintain infrastructure and deliver the facilities needed to keep our community safe.

Again, I want to thank ACT Policing for their continued dedication to serving and protecting the Canberra community. While we work to maintain and improve the infrastructure that supports their operations, it is the professionalism, resilience and commitment of officers and staff that truly underpin community safety. We recognise the challenging work they undertake every day and acknowledge their ongoing efforts to keep both the public and their colleagues safe.

I present the following paper:

ACT Policing facilities management—Improvement—Assembly resolution of 25 June 2025—Ministerial statement, 19 March 2026.

I move:

That the Assembly take note of the paper.

MS CARRICK (Murrumbidgee) (10.47): I welcome the minister's report on the progress on police infrastructure, including the government's stated commitment to a new police station in the Molonglo Valley and maintenance of the Woden Police Station. I also welcome the new Molonglo Emergency Services station, which the government has said remains on track for completion in mid-2026.

As Molonglo grows, people will rightly expect more than pieces of infrastructure delivered in isolation. A police station matters, but so does the broader shape of the town centre around it. Community facilities need to be centrally located, generally accessible and designed around where people actually live, meet and spend time. That is why transparency matters.

The government has said it is progressing planning, analysis and delivery strategies. The community will want to see how those plans translate into real facilities on the ground. What sequence and what level of priority will the Molonglo police station have? How the government handles Molonglo will be important. It will say a lot about whether new suburbs are being planned around complete communities or whether community and essential service infrastructure like the Molonglo police station will be left to catch up later.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Crimes Legislation Amendment Bill 2025 (No 2)

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

That this bill be agreed to in principle.

MS BARRY (Ginninderra) (10.48): I rise to speak on the Crimes Legislation Amendment Bill 2025 (No 2). I state from the outset that the opposition will support this bill. I acknowledge that this bill has been subject to scrutiny by the standing committee, and I recognise the work undertaken to examine its human rights implications and legislative detail.

The scrutiny report itself reinforces the central concern that I have with this bill. This is a bill that amends 10 separate acts, engages multiple rights under the Human Rights Act, and raises issues spanning privacy, liberty, freedom of movement, criminal process, equality, delegated powers and even retrospective application. This is not routine legislation; this is substantial law reform, yet it has been presented to this Assembly as a single omnibus bill.

My concern is that the breadth of this bill makes proper parliamentary consideration

more difficult than it should be. Where legislation engages such serious and distinct issues, particularly across entirely different legislative schemes, there is a strong case for a more focused and standalone debate.

There are elements of this bill that are sensible and necessary. For example, the extension of time for the review of unexplained wealth provisions is administrative. The amendments to the Corrections Management Act to ensure human rights commissioners can properly access detainees and receive protected correspondence are practical and appropriate.

The changes to restorative justice reporting provide clarity and better functionality for referring entities, while maintaining appropriate safeguards. The amendments relating to victim liaison officers remove unnecessary administrative burden, while maintaining confidentiality protections. These are the kinds of amendments that are well suited to an omnibus bill.

There are also elements of the bill that the opposition supports on substance. The amendments to the Crimes (Child Sex Offenders) Act 2025 to update registrable offences and include overlooked commonwealth offences address a clear oversight. The scrutiny report confirms that these additions align closely with existing offences and are necessary to ensure the scheme operates as intended. Similarly, expanding the definition of child-related employment to include all legal services involving contact with children reflects a logical extension of child protection safeguards.

The report acknowledges that these changes engage rights—including the right to work, privacy and liberty—but also notes that they were recommended through statutory review, are targeted in scope, and include safeguards such as delayed commencement. These are proportionate measures in pursuit of a legitimate objective—protecting children.

The scrutiny report also highlights something else—just how uneven the weight of these amendments truly is. We have relatively minor operational changes sitting alongside reforms that go directly to liberty, police powers and community safety. For example, the amendment allowing a registrable offender to be photographed by an officer of the same sex is only “as far as practicable”. The scrutiny report outlines the justification—efficiency and officer safety—and notes the safeguards. But in the scheme of this bill, this is a relatively contained operational change, yet it sits alongside far more significant reforms that engage fundamental rights. That contrast is precisely the problem with omnibus legislation: it obscures what truly matters.

While I welcome the improvements to the Corrections Management Act, I also note what is missing. I have had concerns raised with me about the screening and management of correspondence into and out of correctional facilities, particularly ensuring that vulnerable individuals are not subject to unwanted or inappropriate contact from detainees. These are real issues affecting real people, yet they are not addressed here.

I now turn to what I consider to be the most significant issue in this bill—the consequential amendments to the Mental Health Act 2015. These provisions introduce a new power allowing police to apprehend and return a person to an approved facility

where they have breached a condition of a conditional release order. The scrutiny report confirms that these amendments engage and limit some of the most fundamental rights. It also draws attention to the retrospective application of these provisions to existing orders. These are serious matters.

I understand the purpose of these reforms. The scrutiny report makes it clear that the intention is to maintain public safety and enable authorities to act promptly where a high-risk individual has breached a condition requiring them to reside in a facility. No-one disputes that objective. But the issue is not whether we respond when something goes wrong; the issue is whether we are doing enough to fix the problem in the first place.

As the community at the Australian National University knows all too well, following the events of 2023, and the students and staff who were left traumatised after having witnessed it, failures in this system have real and lasting consequences. When a high-risk individual is released, the risk is not confined to registered affected persons.

In my view, the greater issue of concern here is the conditional release order regime itself. As it stands, ACAT makes a discretionary decision based on medical expert opinion. This happens even when the initial court judgement that has resulted in a person with a mental impairment being placed in a mental health facility provided detailed reasons and a best-estimate sentence outlining all the sentencing considerations. The current regime denies judicial oversight of such a consequential area of powers attached to the Mental Health Act, which ultimately go to the heart of community protection.

My fundamental question here is: is that level of oversight sufficient for decisions of this magnitude? These are decisions about individuals who have committed serious acts of violence but have been found not guilty by reason of mental impairment. These are decisions that go directly to community safety. We should be asking some serious policy questions, such as these: should a judicial officer play a greater role in determining whether a high-risk individual is suitable for conditional release? Should there be clearer statutory thresholds? Should there be categories of individuals for whom conditional release is significantly restricted or not available without court approval? At present those questions remain unanswered. Simply put, there are perhaps some people who should never, ever be granted conditional release.

This regime is counterintuitive and problematic, and these amendments are only the tip of the iceberg. We will continue to give these issues serious thought, but this bill, regrettably, fails to do so. For these reasons, these sorts of amendments to legislative schemes, like those contained under section 180 of the Mental Health Act, should be dealt with separately so that we can address the full gamut of issues that need to be debated.

The scrutiny report also identified areas requiring further clarification and improvement. It asked for additional justification in relation to the pre-sentence report provisions, particularly their impact on the presumption of innocence. It raised questions about the delegation of certain decisions to regulation under the Magistrates Court Act. It identified technical inconsistencies in the Mental Health Act amendment that require correction. These are not fatal flaws, but they demonstrate that, even after

scrutiny, this bill required refinement. That, again, supports the argument that significant reforms of this nature deserve more focused legislative treatment.

The opposition will support this bill, but we are not satisfied that the policy questions have been answered, especially on mental health and community safety. The bill fixes failures but it does not stop them. When high-risk individuals are involved, that distinction matters. I commend the bill to the Assembly.

MR RATTENBURY (Kurrajong) (10.57): The Greens will be supporting this bill today. As has been noted, this is an omnibus bill that addresses a number of matters. Each of them is an important reform that addresses areas of law that need updating or warrant further clarification. The amendments cover a range of legislation, including the Confiscation of Criminal Assets Act, the Corrections Management Act, the Crimes (Child Sex Offenders) Act, the Evidence (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act and the Mental Health Act.

As a member of the Standing Committee on Legal Affairs, I have had the benefit of examining this bill as part of the scrutiny of bills committee—another point of oversight during the passage of the bill through the Assembly. On behalf of the Greens, I am satisfied that each of these amendments are appropriate and make necessary changes. A number of them address matters that arose during the last term of the Assembly, where questions of law that had not been previously considered came to the fore, and I am very pleased to see them being addressed as part of this bill. It reflects the ongoing work of both the government and the Justice and Community Safety Directorate that, as matters arise, they go on to a program of reform, a program of policy consideration, and then come through in these omnibus bills. I think it is a credit to the ACT that we have this sort of mechanism.

I note that government amendments have been secured and will be considered today. The proposed government amendments further delay commencement of the amendments regarding the child sex offender legislation provisions for legal practitioners from three months to six months before the commencement. I am advised that the sector has requested more time to prepare for this legislation. I am keen to see these provisions come into force. I think it is very necessary. I feel some reluctance at the extension, but it is also important that there is sufficient time to ensure effective implementation of the new provisions, and we will ultimately support this amendment. Other amendments respond to a technical issue raised by the committee, and we will also be supporting them.

Overall, this bill represents valuable improvements to a significant number of pieces of legislation. I acknowledge the staff in both the Parliamentary Counsel's Office and the Justice and Community Safety Directorate who have been involved in the preparation of the bill, as well as the stakeholders who will have contributed to its development, and once again indicate the support of the Greens for the bill today.

MS TOUGH (Brindabella) (11.00): I rise today to speak in support of the bill and the government amendments that have been foreshadowed. Each year, we consider at least one, if not two, omnibus bills containing amendments aimed at improving the community's engagement with the criminal justice system. These amendments support practices and procedures that are focused on personal safety and wellbeing and human

rights, and that are efficient and effective for all those involved in the criminal justice system.

Bills like this one that we are debating today demonstrate that ensuring access to justice and balancing of victim and offender rights is not a set-and-forget exercise; it requires regular reflection and refinement to ensure that the legislation governing criminal law and procedure remains fit for purpose and continues to serve the community. I support this bill because, taken as a whole, it is about making our justice system more responsive to the people who rely on it most.

At its core, this bill is about protection—protecting children, supporting victims and witnesses, responding appropriately to vulnerable people, and making sure the justice system works in a way that is practical, timely and humane. Too often when we talk about justice reform we talk only about legal processes in the abstract, but behind every process is real people—the victims, families, witnesses, children, frontline workers, and members of the community who need a system that is not only fair but workable.

That is why reforms of this kind matter. They may not always be the most high-profile changes, but they can make a very real difference to how people experience the justice system day to day. For a victim or witness, a more responsive system can mean less delay, less uncertainty and less re-traumatisation. For a child or a vulnerable person, it can mean stronger safeguards and better protection from avoidable risk. For frontline agencies and decision-makers, it can mean clearer powers, better processes and a greater ability to respond appropriately when circumstances are urgent or complex. These are not merely technical improvements; they are changes that help ensure the justice system is capable of delivering safety, dignity and fairness in practice, not just in principle.

One important feature of this bill is its continued focus on the safety of children. The amendments to the child sex offender framework are clearly directed at strengthening protections and keeping the legislation fit for purpose. In particular, expanding the employment restriction so it applies to all legal services related to a child, rather than only those provided by Legal Aid, is a sensible and consistent safeguard. It reflects the reality that children may encounter legal professionals across a range of settings and that protection should not depend on who the employer happens to be.

This bill also includes reforms that matter for victims and witnesses in a very practical sense. The amendment concerning pre-recorded evidence from dangerously ill witnesses is, in my mind, especially important. It recognises that, where someone is gravely unwell, the justice system should not impose avoidable additional burden or distress. If the liable evidence has already been recorded and the interests of justice support its admission, the law should allow that to occur without unnecessary procedural barriers. This is not only efficient; it is humane.

The same can be said of the amendment allowing pre-sentence reports to be ordered earlier when a defendant indicates an intention to plead guilty. On one level, that is an efficiency measure, as reducing the number of times a defendant needs to attend court increases efficiency of court listings, but it is more than that. Reducing avoidable delays matters to victims waiting for finality, to defendants waiting for matters to resolve and to courts seeking to use limited time and resources well.

I want to acknowledge the amendments that improve how the system supports vulnerable people more broadly. Expanding access for commissioners and their staff to communicate with detainees helps strengthen oversight and supports accountability and rights protection within custodial settings. The amendment to allow certain victim liaison officer functions to be delegated more practically is also important. It reduces administrative barriers and helps ensure that support to victims is not slowed down by unnecessary technical processes.

The mental health amendment is another reminder that a justice system must sometimes operate at the intersection of safety, care and vulnerability. In serious cases, where a person subject to a residence condition leaves an approved mental health facility, there needs to be a lawful and workable mechanism to return them safely. What ties these reforms together is a simple idea: a justice system functions better when it reduces avoidable harm. That means less duplication, less delay, less procedural burden for those already under strain and more focus on safety, dignity and practical outcomes.

For those reasons, I support the bill. I support it because it strengthens protections for children, there is better support for victims and vulnerable people, and it makes a number of sensible changes that will help the justice system operate more effectively in practice. This is the kind of reform that reminds us that efficiency is not just an administrative goal; in the justice system, efficiency can also be an aspect of fairness, dignity and protection.

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS (Brindabella) (11.06): I rise today to speak in support of the bill and the government amendments that the Attorney-General has circulated. I thank my colleagues on the Standing Committee on Legal Affairs and the scrutiny of bills committee, and Ms Barry and Mr Rattenbury for their insights and comments, and, of course, Ms Tough for hers as well.

I want to focus less on the broad policy settings of this bill, which have already been outlined, and perhaps more on the importance of careful legislative design. This bill is a useful example of how this Assembly can approach criminal law reform: with a clear policy objective, with proper and appropriate consultation, and with close attention to safeguards, proportionality and human rights. I particularly note that the explanatory statement has been revised following consideration by the Standing Committee on Legal Affairs in its legislative scrutiny role, and that is important. I am biased, being a member of the committee, but I firmly believe that scrutiny is not an obstacle to reform; it is, in fact, an integral part of good reform. It is part of how we ensure that, in this Assembly, legislation is precise, justified and fit for purpose.

Where rights are limited, the question is not whether parliament can act but whether it is acting carefully, transparently and proportionately. The scrutiny committee plays an important role in this process by scrutinising bills and subordinate legislation for best practice in law-writing and human rights compliance. This bill engages a number of significant issues across the criminal justice system and does so in a way that requires this Assembly to pay close attention to rights, limitations and safeguards. What stood out to me is that this bill is not a bill that simply expands powers in a broad or open-ended way; rather, I find that many of the amendments are carefully confined.

For example, where the bill adjusts the requirements around photographing registrable child sex offenders, it does not remove privacy protections altogether. The bill preserves the requirement that the registrable offender be photographed in private. However, it allows the law to be applied more flexibly by only requiring the photographer or assisting police officer to be the same sex as the offender, as far as practicable. This will allow a person of a different sex to a registrable offender to take a photograph of the offender, and for a police officer of a different sex to the registrable offender to be present during the taking of a photograph, but in limited circumstances. These amendments aim to ensure that the offender registration process is not unduly delayed where a person of the same sex as a registrable offender is not available to photograph the offender.

The amendments also address safety risks to police officers. As an example, they aim to avoid the current possible scenario where one male and one female officer are working together to process a female registrable offender and the male officer is obliged to leave the room while the offender is being photographed. In this scenario, the female officer may be left alone with the offender, thereby exposing that officer to a safety risk. The amendments demonstrate the balance that needs to be struck between the safety and dignity of the individual being photographed and the safety of police officers.

Likewise, where the bill enables a pre-sentence report to be ordered earlier, when a person indicates an intention to plead guilty, it is doing so to improve efficiency, but it also retains important protections around how that material may be used if the plea does not proceed. This amendment permits the creation of a pre-sentence report prior to a defendant pleading guilty. However, one issue that must be acknowledged is the possibility that a pre-sentence report could be prepared and accessed before a guilty plea is formally entered, only for the defendant to later plead not guilty. Because these reports may contain highly personal information and, at times, material relevant to an admission of guilt, that scenario could affect both privacy and criminal process rights. In particular, it could result in information being disclosed earlier than would otherwise occur and may raise concerns where judicial officers are exposed to material that sits at odds with the presumption of innocence.

The bill responds to that risk by making clear that such a report is not admissible unless the defendant is found guilty, enters an accepted guilty plea or consents. It also requires the court to refuse inadmissible reports and, unless all parties agree, ensures the charge is not decided by a magistrate who has already received the report. In addition, the bill creates a new offence for publishing or using sensitive information connected with the report. These safeguards are intended to preserve privacy, protect the presumption of innocence and prevent premature or inappropriate use of the material.

Returning to my earlier point, I think it is worth recognising that this bill is an example of something important to our system of parliamentary democracy: legislation is improved when it is tested. The revised explanatory statement and the circulated government amendments demonstrate a willingness to respond to scrutiny, to clarify the human rights analysis and to correct or refine aspects of the bill where needed. That is how good legislation is made—not by pretending, assuming or saying that the first draft is perfect but by being prepared to explain, justify and, where appropriate, improve it.

I would like to again take the opportunity to thank my colleagues on the scrutiny committee, and, even more so, thank the committee secretary and his team for their tireless dedication to providing non-partisan, non-political and, mercifully, not-so-technical advice in order to support the Assembly to pass laws which are well-written, follow best practice and are human rights compliant.

I support the bill and the proposed government amendments. I do so not only because of the policy outcomes it seeks to achieve but also because it reflects the kind of disciplined and accountable law-making this Assembly should expect, particularly in the criminal law space, where the stakes for liberty, fairness and public confidence are so high.

MR EMERSON (Kurrajong) (11.14): I will be supporting this omnibus bill from the government. I thank the Attorney-General for bringing it forward, as well as the PCO for their work on it, and the members of the committee and the secretariat for their scrutiny. There are certainly a couple of elements that I would like to speak to briefly in relation amendment to the Crimes (Child Sex Offenders) Act 2005 that limit the ability for child sex offenders to work with children in relation to the provision of legal services. I acknowledge Ms Morris's advocacy on this matter and expect and hope she will be pleased to see her proposed amendment from March last year being actioned today. As I said at the time, I would have liked to have supported Ms Morris's amendment but indicated I did not have sufficient time to consult on any potential unintended consequences, given the late timing of its circulation before that debate.

I note that the government's amendment, circulated yesterday, as Mr Rattenbury noted as well, further delays the commencement of this provision, which is unfortunate, given the time that has passed since this was first raised by Ms Morris, but I also understand the need for stakeholders to prepare, and hope that there is no further delay in its implementation.

With all of that said, I commend the Attorney-General for following through on her commitment at that time to revisit this amendment as part of an appropriate sequencing of reforms to close any loopholes that may have enabled child sex offenders to undertake work connected to children or that puts children at risk. I note the Attorney-General noted last year that this is part of a broader suite of policy development to ensure that all relevant professions are captured. She commented that there are other professions that were likely not captured with the amendment that Ms Morris had moved, so I anticipate further reforms of this nature to come. That will ensure that all work that involves contact with children that should be captured under this legislation is captured.

UNSW research from 2023 found that almost one in six Australian men have sexual feelings toward children and teenagers, and almost one in 10 acknowledge having committed child sexual offences. This data is both deeply disturbing and incredibly concerning. So I also welcome the provisions this bill contains that expand the list of offences that trigger an obligation to register a person as a child sex offender, ensuring insidious grooming practices are appropriately recognised for their obvious connection to and facilitation of child sexual abuse, and ultimately ensuring that children are protected. I welcome the introduction of those amendments.

The other section I want to briefly touch on is amendments to the Magistrates Court Act 1930, relating to the administration of infringement notices for offences other than those contained in the road transport legislation. I am probably getting ahead of myself, but I am hopeful that these changes signal a shift from the government to ensure that, where infringement notices are prescribed as penalties, such as the breaches for the Education and Care Services National Law, those penalties will actually be able to be administered where appropriate.

I have commented on this point previously, so I will not labour the point today, but where particularly egregious breaches occur to our laws or where the same breaches occur repeatedly, with threats or the theoretical threat to impose fines but no real recourse, we cannot be surprised if those breaches continue to occur, so I welcome action by the government to ensure that infringement penalties can and will be applied where that is appropriate to help achieve the behaviour change that is ultimately the intent of such penalties.

With all of that said, I look forward to supporting the passage of this bill and its amendments.

MS CHEYNE (Ginninderra—Manager of Government Business, Attorney-General, Minister for Human Rights, Minister for City and Government Services and Minister for the Night-Time Economy) (11.17), in reply: I thank the chamber for its support and endorsement of this bill today. We are a government that is committed to a criminal justice system that strikes the balance between the rights of victims, witnesses, offenders and the community. The bill makes a number of amendments to improve the community's engagement with the criminal justice system. As always, we make these amendments with the aim of supporting personal safety, wellbeing and human rights.

I thank the Legislative Assembly's Standing Committee on Legal Affairs (Legislative Scrutiny Role) for their review of the bill. That committee recommended in Scrutiny Report 14 that I consider amending the explanatory statement for the bill to address some minor matters in relation to the amendments to the Crimes (Sentencing) Act 2005 and to the amendments to the Magistrates Court Act 1930. I am pleased to advise that today I am tabling a revised explanatory statement in accordance with that. I also wish to foreshadow that I will also be moving government amendments to the bill to make minor changes to the Crimes (Child Sex Offenders) Act 2005 and the Mental Health Act 2015. I am grateful that the Assembly is cognisant of that and has engaged with those amendments and will be supporting them as well.

The bill amends the Crimes (Child Sex Offenders) Act 2005 to ensure it remains fit for purpose in achieving its objective of ensuring the safety of children. Under the act, offenders who have been convicted of certain child sex offences are registrable offenders and are required to comply with certain obligations. A key facet of the act is a prohibition on registrable offenders engaging in or applying to engage in child-related employment. Child-related employment includes employment, training or volunteer work in places likely to involve contact with a child—for example at daycare centres, educational or religious institutions, clubs, associations and overnight camps.

Last year, I introduced a bill that amended the definition of "child-related employment" to prohibit registered child sex offenders from working at Legal Aid ACT. That is

because children often come into contact with legal service providers and, in particular, Legal Aid ACT. A statutory review has now been conducted on that amendment that occurred at the time. I thank Mr Rattenbury for moving the amendment that facilitated that review and note Mr Emerson's excellent recollection of what led to that. Following that review and consultation with stakeholders, this bill removes the specific reference to Legal Aid ACT so that the meaning of child-related employment includes all legal services related to a child and not just Legal Aid ACT. This will mean that registered child sex offenders are not able to apply for or be employed in any legal services related to a child, regardless of the employer. This is an important step to ensure consistent application of the legislation.

Following the introduction of this bill, legal sector stakeholders reached out to request a longer commencement period to enable more time to adjust their processes and ensure compliance. Accordingly, I will move a government amendment to amend the commencement period for this amendment from three months to six months. I will do that in the details stage.

The bill will also amend the Crimes (Child Sex Offenders) Act with respect to the process for photographing registrable offenders. Under the act, a registrable offender may be required to have their photo taken to assist law enforcement, for crime prevention or child protection purposes. The act requires that the photograph must be taken in private and by a person who is the same sex as the registrable offender. Additionally, any police officer assisting the photographer must be of the same sex as the registrable offender. The amendment in this bill will only require the photographer or assisting police officer to be of the same sex as the registrable offender so far as practicable. This will improve efficiencies for the registration process. The drafting of this amendment strikes the balance between the safety and dignity of the individual being photographed and the safety of police officers. This amendment is not an exemption from the preferred approach that the police officer be of the same sex as the registrable offender.

Amendments in this bill will also protect various persons who find themselves needing to engage with the ACT's criminal justice system and includes amendments that respond in part to recommendation 31 of the Chief Psychiatrist's report, which was made following an incident at the ANU which involved an inpatient residing at the Gawanggal Mental Health Unit. The bill amends the Mental Health Act 2015 to authorise ACT Policing to return a person who contravenes a conditional release order to the mental health facility where they are required to reside. The amendments only apply to people who are subject to a conditional release order who are required to reside at a mental health facility. The amendment will also create powers of entry and apprehension and search and seizure for police when they are returning a person to a mental health facility. This will improve safety for the community and for individuals on conditional release orders.

I intend to move three government amendments in relation to this act to oppose clauses 70 to 72. They were inserted as a technical amendment to correct a drafting error but had already been included in an earlier Statute Law Amendment Bill that we have now passed and are therefore no longer needed. I am very grateful to the Scrutiny Committee for picking up this error.

To improve efficiencies and protect the safety and wellbeing of witnesses in criminal justice matters, the bill amends the Evidence (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1991. At present, the act allows the court to pre-record the evidence of dangerously ill witnesses, but that recording can only be used if the witness dies or if the witness's condition has worsened. The court typically requires the witness to attend court to give evidence that their condition has worsened, which can be challenging when the witness is already very ill. This amendment will allow the court to determine when it is in the interests of the administration of justice to use pre-recorded evidence. I think this is an exceptionally sensible amendment.

Further, the bill amends the Crimes (Sentencing) Act 2005 to authorise magistrates and registrars to order a pre-sentence report for a defendant once the defendant indicates to the court an intention to plead guilty. A pre-sentence report is a document that is prepared by Corrective Services to assist sentencing. It provides information to the court about the defendant and it contextualises their offending. By allowing this report to be ordered when the defendant indicates a plea of guilty, it will reduce the time matters take to be progressed and completed, which will be beneficial for victims and defendants alike and improve efficiencies for the court.

The bill expands human rights protections by improving the access to correctional facilities for commissioners exercising functions on behalf of the Human Rights Commission, ensuring that the rights of detainees to access protected contact with the Human Rights Commission extends to all commissioners. This will be done by amending the Corrections Management Act 2007 to enable all commissioners under the Human Rights Commission Act 2005 to exercise important functions in communicating with detainees under the Corrections Management Act, including entering the Alexander Maconochie Centre and sending protected correspondence to detainees. The act currently restricts these actions to the President of the Human Rights Commission and the Public Advocate. However, I think it is plainly obvious that other commissioners, including the Health Services Commissioner and Discrimination Commissioner, provide vital services for detainees that are not currently protected by the ACT. ACT Corrective Services have put in place arrangements to ensure detainees can contact and correspond privately with all commissioners, but this amendment will provide statutory protection for these actions.

The bill also contains a number of amendments that will improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the ACT's criminal justice system and remove unnecessary administrative burden for those engaging with or operating in it. The bill will amend the Magistrates Court Act 1930 to improve the administration of infringement notices. I note Mr Emerson's enthusiasm for this amendment, and I share that enthusiasm. These amendments align the Magistrates Court Infringement Notice Scheme with administrative law norms by giving the administering authority powers to manage infringement notices and to clarify arrangements when an application to withdraw an infringement notice is approved.

The bill also makes amendments to the Crimes (Sentence Administration) Act 2005 and the Victims of Crime Act 1994 to create operational efficiencies for police and the community by removing administrative practices that negatively impact the ability of police to participate in the administration of the criminal justice system in a timely and efficient manner. The bill amends the Crimes (Sentence Administration) Act 2005 to

legislate that the Chief Police Officer is a standing member of the Sentence Administration Board instead of requiring an appointment process and it extends the delegation of the Chief Police Officer on the board. At present, the Chief Police Officer is only able to delegate their role to commanders. There are only two commanders in ACT Policing, and obviously these are exceptionally senior positions. Due to other pressing operational responsibilities, these commanders have sometimes been unable to sufficiently engage with the board. I think that is perfectly justifiable when you know how senior they are and that there are just two of them.

This amendment will permit the Chief Police Officer to delegate their role on the board to superintendents. That will ensure that ACT Policing is able to regularly attend Sentence Administration Board meetings and provide valuable input, on which board members rely, while still being at a suitably senior level. The bill also amends the Victims of Crime Act 1994 to permit the Chief Police Officer to delegate their powers under the act to victim liaison officers in ACT Policing without the requirement to have the liaison officers sworn in every 24 months under the Australian Federal Police Act, which can be, as you would expect, administratively burdensome.

Finally, the bill amends the Crimes (Restorative Justice) Act 2004 to remove unnecessary administrative burden and simplify the reporting requirements for the Director-General of the Justice and Community Safety Directorate, so that the director-general is only required to provide a report to the restorative justice referring entities every year, rather than every quarter. These amendments will not adversely impact referring entities who track and reconcile matters as each matter closes, but rather it will align reporting with a standard that is commonly accepted across government.

I certainly thank stakeholders for their valuable input to the amendments in this bill, and I thank the many members of the Assembly for their engagement with it and especially thank the Scrutiny Committee for their useful feedback, which, as Mr Werner-Gibbins rightly noted, has improved the bill. I thank the policy officers in the Justice and Community Safety Directorate who work so incredibly hard—it boggles my mind; and I promise not to make it harder and then sometimes do. So I greatly appreciate everything that they do and note the incredible legislative reform program that we have already progressed in this term of government, let alone what is coming. Minister Paterson and I have been engaging with a lot of work in that space, but the people who are really doing the work are our policy officers in JACS. I want them to know that they are seen and we do appreciate the very long hours that they put into this work. I certainly thank the Parliamentary Counsel Office for the exceptional drafting once again. Again, we are just so lucky to have such an extraordinarily qualified Parliamentary Counsel Office.

I do also want to flag my office. Elsa Sengstock, in my office, is a legal policy machine or wonder—something in between. What she does is quite exceptional and very, very appreciated. I know that most members in this place have had engagement with Ms Sengstock on this bill or on other bills. She really is a powerhouse—that is probably the word I was looking for—and I sincerely thank her for all the efforts that she undertakes liaising across government and across stakeholders and with the directorate as we pursue a pretty ambitious legislative reform program. With that, I commend the bill to the Assembly.

Bill agreed to in principle.

Detail stage

Bill, by leave, taken as a whole.

MS CHEYNE (Ginninderra—Manager of Government Business, Attorney-General, Minister for Human Rights, Minister for City and Government Services and Minister for the Night-Time Economy) (11.32), by leave: I move together amendments Nos 1 to 4 circulated in my name, which are in response to Scrutiny Committee comments, together [*see schedule 1 at page 1018*], and I table a supplementary explanatory statement to the government amendments.

Amendment No 1, as I have foreshadowed, substitutes clause 2(2) of the bill to omit the reference to three months and replace this with a reference to six months. This will mean that the amendment to section 124(1)(t) of the Crimes (Child Sex Offenders) Act 2005 commences six months after its notification date. As we have discussed before, section 124 defines child-related employment for the purposes of registrable offenders being prohibited from child-related employment. It will expand that definition from applying to legal services related to a child provided by Legal Aid ACT to simply “legal services related to a child”. This will enable organisations such as law firms more time to prepare for their obligations under the new law. We certainly respect and have taken seriously their feedback, and that is why this amendment is being moved today; so that the commencement will be in six months, not three.

Then, as also foreshadowed amendments Nos 2 to 4 oppose clauses 70, 71 and 72 of the bill, because these clauses are no longer necessary as they have already been passed by the Statute Law Amendment Act 2025. Again, I sincerely thank the Scrutiny Committee for picking that up.

Amendments agreed to.

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

Bill, as amended, agreed to.

Economy—exports Ministerial statement

MR BARR (Kurrajong—Chief Minister, Minister for Economic Development and Minister for Tourism and Trade) (11.35), by leave: I thank the Assembly for its indulgence. This morning I am pleased to provide an update on the success of the territory’s export industries, industries that are central to our territory’s economic growth, resilience and international reputation. Aligned with the ambitions of the CBR2030 economic development strategy that was released late last year, the territory’s export industries are knowledge-based, creating opportunities for Canberrans in an increasingly competitive global economy. It reflects who we are as a city: smart, highly skilled, increasingly diversified and globally connected.

The territory's export strengths lie overwhelmingly in the services sector, reflecting our identity as Australia's knowledge capital, home to world-class universities, research institutions, digital innovation and professional expertise. In fact, Canberra's export profile is the most services-oriented in the nation. Data shows that ACT services exports exceeded \$2.6 billion in fiscal 2023-24 and the total export volumes grew by 2½ per cent through the year to June 2025. This is demonstrating sustained growth in our international markets and is mirroring a national trend towards more service exports, where education, travel and knowledge-based services have driven tangible export outcomes.

Again, a sector that deserves special recognition is, of course, the international education sector. As I have mentioned previously, export income from this sector has more than doubled from \$633 million to \$1.54 billion between 2015-16 and 2023-2024, highlighting the sector's growing contribution to the local economy. This is an area of our service exports in which we intend to continue to pursue growth. We do so because international students not only are contributors by way of our largest export market but make an important and significant contribution to enriching our community, supporting local jobs and strengthening global alumni networks for decades to come.

Mr Assistant Speaker, the territory's economy is increasingly driven by high-value global industries such as advanced technology, cybersecurity, clean energy innovation, higher education and professional services. The government is focused on supporting Canberra businesses to scale beyond just our local market, or indeed our national market, to look at international opportunities. So when a Canberra-based technology company secures contracts overseas, when a university attracts more international students, or when local expertise in, say, renewable energy or digital services is exported abroad, those gains flow directly back to our local economy, supporting increased employment, investment and innovation here in Canberra.

The territory's International Engagement Strategy is central to bolstering these global ties, and it is aimed at leveraging these areas, where we have great strength, to open new doors for trade and collaboration. Obviously, as a small and services-driven export jurisdiction, the territory relies heavily on access to external markets, investment opportunities and partnerships that are leveraged through our friends in the Australian government, particularly Austrade and the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade.

The government's annual trade mission program is an important part of this growth strategy. Coordinated by the Office for International Engagement and VisitCanberra, through Economic Development, and supported by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, and Austrade, the territory's missions are carefully targeted and designed to generate long-term outcomes for our local exporters, facilitating relationships and supporting investment attraction. They are a key part of diversifying the territory's economy, generating export pathways for local firms, attracting direct foreign investment into the territory economy and reinforcing our reputation as a high-value knowledge economy.

Of course, trade missions are not unique to the ACT. Every state and territory government in the country runs them, and governments around the world routinely utilise them as proven instruments for building economic relationships, opening doors for businesses that they cannot easily access alone, and signalling long-term

commitments to important bilateral partnerships.

For the territory, participation is essential if we want to grow our international student enrolments, research collaborations, technology investments and export contracts. Without these engagements, local businesses and institutions would be at a considerable disadvantage compared to interstate and international competitors who are, of course, supported very extensively by their own governments' trade programs.

Pleasingly, we have continued seen real, tangible outcomes in the approach that the government has taken, and I will highlight some now. We have established a marketing activity partnership with Ctrip.com, which is China's largest online travel platform. We have educated leading tourism distribution partners in Shanghai about Canberra, in partnership with Tourism Australia, and now have Canberra as a destination on the Australian itineraries of those leading tourism distribution partners. We have established an in-market resource in Tourism Australia's Shanghai office.

We have also established the Council of Pacific Capital Cities, with Suva and Wellington as the other founding members. This is a platform for practical cooperation and knowledge sharing across a range of areas, including climate change, sustainable development, economic diversification, arts and culture, and governance. I note, of course, this parliament's own twinning arrangements in the Pacific and encourage that further engagement at a parliamentary level.

We have supported Canberra company EPC Solar to achieve commercial outcomes in Fiji. In April of 2025, the company signed an MoU to provide solar products to Musket Cove, Plantation Island and Lomani Island Resort, and it has since signed another with Canberra-based ONA Coffee, which will see it provide 100 per cent renewable power for ONA coffee's new coffee factory in Rakiraki in Fiji.

We have progressed cooperative arrangements and co-investment opportunities with both Fiji Airways and Fiji Tourism, marketing the Canberra connection through Nadi into North America. Coming up next month, I think, Fiji Airways is doing a major Canberra promotion across its entire network. Together with Canberra Airport, we have continued to promote the business case for a Canberra to Auckland connection, with a particular focus on Air New Zealand as a partner there, and for Canberra to Singapore, with Singapore Airlines being the principal target to provide that service.

We have supported Canberra's emerging carbon capture and utilisation industry, with investment and market entry opportunities in Japan. We have also consistently engaged with investors to reinforce our position as a trusted economic partner, highlighting our trade prospectus and reaffirming future opportunities to deliver transformative infrastructure for Canberra.

This is an expansive but not conclusive list. It is important that we maximise the impact of these partnerships, particularly through the Australian government agencies who support this work, Austrade in particular, but also with the industry stakeholders. The success of Canberra businesses in export markets confirms the impact of our export industry.

Canberra companies have consistently demonstrated global excellence in sectors

ranging from advanced manufacturing to digital innovation. There is a standout example: Liquid Instruments, who have been recognised as ACT Exporter of the Year in 2025, serving clients including major international technology and aerospace firms. These businesses prove that global success is driven from Canberra and that our city's talent pipeline, supported by our tertiary institutions, can generate innovation that has global reach.

We should, of course, be very proud of the achievements of these firms but also recognise the challenges ahead, when we are increasingly experiencing the impacts of global economic uncertainty—conflicts both in trade and military, which obviously were the subject of this morning's national cabinet—experiencing increased competition for international students and investment, and ongoing shifts in international markets.

The government's response to these challenges is very clear, and I sent that signal this morning: we will continue to support local exporters through targeted programs and international engagement. We seek, this year in particular, to strengthen links with high-growth markets across our ASEAN partners, with the impending signing of a free trade agreement between Australia and the European Union that will be an area of focus, and beyond, through our trade program, leveraging the success of the commonwealth's work and negotiations.

Clearly as a small jurisdiction, we must work in partnership with the Australian government and that is what we do. We seek to prioritise investment in sectors where Canberra does hold a genuine competitive advantage: digital technologies, infrastructure, clean energy, defence and space-related industries, higher education and professional services.

The territory's export story is one of confidence—of a relatively small jurisdiction focusing on exporting and succeeding. From billion-dollar international education exports to cutting-edge technology companies winning customers around the world, we are proving that knowledge and innovation are powerful export commodities.

Through investment in the principles that are outlined in the CBR2030 economic development strategy and our international engagement strategies, we seek to build an economy that is more outward-looking, more inclusive and more resilient. Importantly, at the heart of all of this is creating opportunities for every Canberrans. We thank the businesses, the workers, the educators and the community members whose efforts every single day contribute to this export success. Together, we work with them to ensure that Canberra continues to punch well above its weight on the global stage.

I present the following paper:

Export Industry Update—Ministerial statement, 19 March 2026.

I move:

That the Assembly take note of the paper.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Leave of absence

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

That leave of absence be granted to Mr Cocks for this sitting day due to personal reasons.

Sitting suspended from 11.49 am to 2.00 pm

Questions without notice

Canberra Institute of Technology—Chief Executive Officer

MR PARTON: My question is to the Chief Minister. Chief Minister, in question time yesterday, your skills minister admitted that he became aware of the serious allegations made against Dr Margo McNeill, the CIT CEO, on 17 June 2025, the day before she started in the role. Chief Minister, when did your skills minister advise you of these worrying developments?

MR BARR: I believe on that day.

MR PARTON: That being the case, what action did you take upon finding out?

MR BARR: A range of actions that included, obviously, the work that the minister has undertaken, given the direct legislative responsibilities. We have provided guidance and assistance to the minister's office and, of course, engaged other areas of government in relation to what would be the appropriate steps, given the information becoming available.

MS MORRIS: Chief Minister, did you or have you sought any advice from your Labor counterpart in New South Wales on the substantiated findings of misconduct against Dr McNeill? And, if so, will you table that advice?

MR BARR: By my counterpart, I presume you mean the Premier of New South Wales.

MR SPEAKER: You might want to clarify that, Ms Morris.

Ms Morris: Yes.

MR BARR: No. I have not raised the matter with the Premier of New South Wales.

Canberra Institute of Technology—Chief Executive Officer

MR PARTON: My question is to the Minister for Skills, Training and Industrial Relations. Minister, I refer to your answer in question time yesterday when you said you were advised by an anonymous complaint to the ACT Integrity Commission about the allegations made against Dr Margo McNeill, the CIT CEO, on 17 June 2025. You went on to say that you sought advice about the due diligence undertaken by the board on the recruitment process. Minister, can you tell me, please, on what date did you seek that advice on due diligence undertaken by the board?

MR PETTERSSON: I thank the Leader of the Opposition for the question. The question, I think, is misconstrued. In my correspondence to the CIT board, I sought for them to provide me with the due diligence of their recruitment processes.

Mr Parton: When was the question? The question is: when?

MR SPEAKER: Do you have a point of order?

Mr Parton: On a point of order on relevance, the question was: on what date did you seek that advice. That was the question.

MR SPEAKER: The question is about the date rather than what action you took, if you are able to get to the date if you have it.

MR PETTERSSON: I will take it on notice. I have already agreed to come back to the chamber to provide correspondence between me and the CIT board. That will be clear within that, but I will also take it on notice.

MR PARTON: Thank you, Minister.

Minister, did you direct the board to delay her commencement date, given the serious nature of these allegations, which have now been substantiated?

MR PETTERSSON: I thank the Leader of the Opposition for the question. I appreciate the intent behind the question, but I think it misunderstands the nature of the relationship between me as the minister and the CIT CEO. For the benefit of members here, the timeline that applies to the recruitment of the CEO is as follows. On 5 December 2024, recruitment of a new CEO commences for the CIT. On 11 April 2025, the CIT consults with me on my expectations of the CEO, which I responded to on 13 May, where I said my expectations were that the CEO of CIT should be able to build and foster community confidence in the CIT. Then, on 20 May, I was notified that Dr McNeill was recommended by a selection panel. On 27 May, a week later, the CIT board chair signs the appointment instrument to make Dr McNeill CIT CEO. On 4 June 2025, Dr McNeill is publicly announced as the incoming CEO. Then 17 June was when I was notified of the correspondence from the Integrity Commission.

MS LEE: Minister, do you still hold confidence in the CIT board, given these allegations?

MR PETTERSSON: I thank Ms Lee for the supplementary question. Yes, I do continue to hold confidence that the CIT board can build community confidence in CIT. If that were to change—and I appreciate the line of questioning—I am sure the chamber will be the first to know.

Canberra Institute of Technology—Chief Executive Officer

MR PARTON: Mr Speaker, my question is to the minister for skills. Minister, documents obtained from the Industrial Relations Commission of New South Wales, show that Dr McNeill was advised by TAFE NSW:

...your resignation will now be reflected in TAFE NSW's records as a termination by TAFE NSW of your employment due to substantiated findings of misconduct.

Minister, what is the nature of these substantiated findings of misconduct, and can you advise the Assembly of the details?

MR PETTERSSON: I would like to thank the Leader of the Opposition for the question. I am not aware of the details of the New South Wales investigation.

MR PARTON: Minister, how can you stand by the board's appointment of Dr McNeill, given you have just told us that you have no idea—you have just told us that you are not aware of the nature of the findings against her. That being the case, how can you possibly stand by the board's appointment of Dr McNeill?

MR PETTERSSON: I would like to thank the Leader of the Opposition for the question. I am not going to enter into a running commentary on the actions of the independent CIT board. There are very clear and distinct responsibilities for me as the minister and for them as the board. As such, acknowledging those distinct roles, I will not be commenting on those matters in that way.

MS BARRY: Minister, have you asked the CIT board to direct Dr McNeill to stand down, given the TAFE NSW investigation found that she had substantiated findings of misconduct against her?

MR PETTERSSON: I would like to thank Ms Barry for the question. As minister, I have distinct responsibilities as outlined in the Canberra Institute of Technology Act and the CIT board has distinct responsibilities. I respect the different and very separate roles that we have. Hiring and ongoing management is a matter for the CIT board. I respect their independence as the board, so I will refrain from commentating on matters of this nature.

Ms Lee: Point of order. Ms Barry's question to the minister was very clear: has he actually asked the CIT board to direct Dr McNeill to stand down? He has given a commentary about the independence of the board from him as minister, but he has not actually directly, relevantly answered the question.

MR SPEAKER: I do not know if he has anything further to add, but I thought it was pretty clear that he said that was not within his remit, that it was a matter for the board not for him—

Ms Lee: It does not confirm whether he has done it or not.

MR SPEAKER: So, therefore, he had not. Certainly, as I understood it. So I do not think there is a point of order.

Fuel security—national cabinet

MS TOUGH: My question is to the Chief Minister. Chief Minister, can you provide the Assembly with an update on the national cabinet meeting that was held this

morning?

MR BARR: I thank Ms Tough for the question. Yes, I can. The Prime Minister convened national cabinet today to address fuel security and supply chain resilience in Australia. The message was very clear that the nation is well prepared and that current supply is secure. Australia is in a good position at present. It does not have an overall fuel shortage at this time. There are, however, some shortages in specific areas due to an increase in demand in those locations. These are principally regional areas.

National cabinet committed to prioritising securing fuel supply for Australian industry and households, whilst also seeking to shield Australians from higher prices. It was acknowledged in the meeting, Mr Speaker, that the longer the conflict in the Middle East goes on, the more significant the impact will be for global supply chains, fuel prices and the wider economy. The best outcome therefore is to ensure Australia is prepared for those potential scenarios, and today's meeting reinforced that approach.

MS TOUGH: Chief Minister, how will the ACT continue to work with the commonwealth and New South Wales governments?

MR BARR: The ACT and New South Wales governments have committed to work closely together in relation to cross-border fuel considerations. In addition to being part of the Fuel Supply Taskforce announced today by the Prime Minister, there are a number of governmental committees, working groups and meetings being held over the coming days and weeks to ensure a coordinated approach to the emerging situation. Energy ministers are meeting tomorrow. The National Emergency Management Agency's national coordination mechanisms are meeting regularly.

Officials from all states and territories, the commonwealth, and senior representatives of the oil industry hold regular meetings of the National Oil Supplies Emergency Committee. The ACT government is also liaising with ACT service station operators in relation to fuel supply and demand, whilst we set up avenues to hear the experiences and concerns of other impacted local industries, which could include tourism, construction and agriculture, in relation to issues they may be experiencing as a result of the conflict in the Middle East.

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: Chief Minister, what will be the key tasks of commonwealth Fuel Supply Taskforce Coordinator in partnership with states and territories?

MR BARR: The commonwealth has appointed Anthea Harris as the new Fuel Supply Taskforce Coordinator. She will be supporting coordination across all levels of government and sectors of the economy. The coordinator will be leading a new Fuel Supply Taskforce that will be established in the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet here in Canberra, providing updates to the commonwealth and across the states and territories on the fuel supply outlook, as well as our domestic fuel distribution.

The taskforce will support state and territory governments to get fuels to their regions where they are in demand, and act as a single convening point for fuel supply and forward planning.

I will seek to keep the Assembly informed on information in relation to fuel supply and security, as this information is provided to the ACT government.

Canberra Institute of Technology—Chief Executive Officer

MR PARTON: My question is to the minister for skills. Minister, documents obtained from the Industrial Relations Commission New South Wales show that Dr McNeill lodged an application for unfair dismissal against TAFE NSW on 14 January this year. A hearing was held this month, with a decision handed down on 13 March. The documents also show that Dr McNeill provided a witness statement to the IRC on 24 February 2026.

Minister, was Dr McNeill on leave from her position as CEO of CIT when she was participating in her IRC action against TAFE NSW over the period of January to March of this year?

Ms Orr: Mr Speaker, on point of order. Noting the notice of motion that has been circulated during question time is going to the exact line of questioning that Mr Parton is asking, I seek your advice as to whether there is any considerations of pre-empting debate.

MR SPEAKER: I think that the motion is not on the notice paper and it has not been moved, although it has been circulated. I will get some clarity from the Clerk, but that being the case, I am presuming that it is not pre-empting debate. I will check with the Clerk to make sure that he agrees with me.

Ms Lee: That was pre-empting the answer!

Members interjecting—

MR SPEAKER: I have even got a better one to come back at you with, which is that that used to be a standing order but is not anymore.

Mr Barr: It is not anymore, yes.

MR SPEAKER: I know that I am old school, and you are pretty old school as well! For the members' information that was a standing order that was removed because I guess a lot of what we do in here does anticipate debate. So we can move on. We are back to Mr Parton's question to the minister, and I call Minister Pettersson.

MR PETTERSSON: Could the Leader of the Opposition just repeat the last bit—the actual question?

MR PARTON: Was Dr McNeill on leave from her position as CEO of CIT when she was participating in her IRC action against TAFE NSW over the period of January to March 2026? Was she working from court?

MR PETTERSSON: I would like to thank the Leader of the Opposition for the question. I will have to take that question on notice and seek advice from relevant entities.

MR PARTON: Minister, did ACT taxpayers pay the legal fees for Dr McNeill in her IRC action against TAFE NSW? If so, how much were the fees?

MR PETTERSSON: I would like to thank the Leader of the Opposition for the question. I cannot speak to the nature of those arrangements. I will take that on notice.

MS LEE: Minister, whilst you are taking that on notice, are ACT taxpayers also footing the bill for the costs order that was made against Dr McNeill at the hearing, and are ACT taxpayers also footing the bill for her ongoing legal claim against TAFE NSW?

MR PETTERSSON: I thank Ms Lee for the question. I am not aware of the financial arrangements behind those matters, so I will take it on notice and see if there is any information that can be provided.

Budget—commonwealth funding

MR RATTENBURY: My question is to the Treasurer. Treasurer, the ACT community often feels that we are missing out on commonwealth funding. The commonwealth is putting \$230 million into the rail line from Newcastle to Sydney. When will we get commonwealth funds for the Canberra to Sydney link and what steps did you or Treasury take to ensure that the agency sought funds?

MR BARR: I will take this question, as I am leading the intergovernmental work on this matter.

The ACT and New South Wales governments are engaging with the commonwealth in relation to the Canberra-Sydney rail corridor. We have submitted, as part of the Infrastructure Australia process, a proposal that has been endorsed by Infrastructure Australia and put forward as part of the national Infrastructure Priority List. That is an important outcome, as it certainly aids our case for commonwealth funding—noting, of course, that the line between Canberra and Sydney has multiple owners and multiple users. Principally, the commonwealth government does have responsibility for a section of the line and for a number of freight-related activities on that line. The New South Wales government principally utilises the line—

Mr Rattenbury: A point of order. I thank the Chief Minister for the information. My actual question was: what steps did Treasury take—and the Treasurer—to ensure that the agency sought funds? I am keen to understand whether our central agency is ensuring that the ACT gets maximum access to commonwealth funds.

MR SPEAKER: Could you turn to that?

MR BARR: Yes. Chief Minister, Treasury and Economic Development, as Mr Rattenbury is aware, is one directorate. That directorate is leading the engagement, but because it is an intergovernmental project in the infrastructure space, I am leading that work. But the agency is involved, Mr Rattenbury.

MR RATTENBURY: Noting last year's announcement of \$1 billion for mental health facilities funding, what proportion did the ACT receive and what steps did Treasury

take to ensure that we sought the maximum amount of funds that we were able to?

MR SPEAKER: Treasurer, will you take that one?

MR STEEL: I will take that on notice.

MISS NUTTALL: Noting recent AEU comments on commonwealth non-government school capital grants, which have almost \$3 billion scheduled between 2025 and 2034, how much commonwealth capital funding for public schools will the ACT get during this period, and what steps has the Treasurer taken to ensure that the agency will seek and secure those funds?

MR STEEL: Again, I will take that on notice. It cuts across Minister Berry's portfolio, as minister for education. I will be talking with her about how the government is engaging with that initiative.

Old Bus Depot Markets—licence

MR EMERSON: My question is to the Minister for Business, Arts and Creative Industries. In January last year, you announced that the operation of the Former Transport Depot in Kingston was out to tender and that submissions closed on 13 March last year. Fourteen months have passed since that announcement. Stallholders at the Old Bus Depot Markets continue to reach out to me and my office expressing concern about this and the future of the site. The last we heard was that the current operator had their licence extended until January this year so stallholders would not miss the Christmas trading period. Minister, why has this process taken so long? Has the government terminated the lease with the current operator, and, if not, can you provide a clear deadline for reaching agreement on what is next?

MR PETTERSSON: I thank Mr Emerson for the question. I am not in a position to provide a clear timeline. The decisions relating to this reside with the delegate. I can provide some further information to the chamber, however. The ACT government has a licence agreement with Iconic Markets and Events to operate the Old Bus Depot Markets out of the Former Transport Depot. The licence expired on 30 June 2025 and Iconic are currently occupying and using the Former Transport Depot on a monthly holding-over occupancy arrangement. This arrangement can be ended by either party providing three months notice to the other.

In January 2026, the ACT government and Iconic agreed to not end this arrangement before 6 April 2026. This provides certainty for the stallholders of the Old Bus Depot Markets to trade through the Easter period while negotiations around a new licence agreement continue. If the next licence agreement has not been finalised prior to this date, Iconic will continue occupying the Former Transport Depot on a month-by-month basis.

MR EMERSON: Minister, was it a mistake to essentially go out to the market blind with an open tender for the operation of the bus depot site without first doing the groundwork of engaging with stallholders and developing some sort of vision for the future of the site?

MR PETTERSSON: I thank Mr Emerson for the supplementary question. I cannot accept the premise of that. The government were considered in our process of seeking to revitalise the Former Transport Depot and ensure that it gets the most use and most benefit for the Canberra community that it can. Of course, the markets and the stallholders that currently utilise that space on certain days are key considerations, but they are not the only considerations in seeking to get the greatest benefit for the entire Canberra community in activating and utilising that space.

MS CARRICK: Minister, how many of the stallholders have you met with, and have they raised with you any concerns about the current operator of the Old Bus Depot Markets?

MR PETTERSSON: I thank Ms Carrick for the supplementary question. I have met with about a handful of stallholders. Many members of the community and stallholders have expressed a wide array of opinions about the markets as well as the Former Transport Depot. I will not seek to summarise them for the benefit of the chamber, other than to simply state that there is a wide array of views.

West Plaza Woden—vehicle access

MS CARRICK: My question is to the Minister for Planning and Sustainable Development regarding the government's decision to allow cars to travel through the new West Plaza in the heart of the Woden town centre.

West Plaza has been designed as a central public space, a destination for people to gather, spend time and participate in markets, events and community activities. Its purpose is to strengthen local identity, connection and community life. Allowing vehicles to travel through and park in this space will fundamentally undermine its function as a civic plaza. Cars have never previously travelled through this area and, since Callam Street closed three years ago for construction of the bus interchange, local travel patterns have adapted. I have not received a single representation from the community calling for this road to be opened. Allowing cars through West Plaza is comparable to opening Garema Place to traffic.

Minister, why is the government proposing to allow cars to travel through a new public plaza in the heart of the Woden town centre, where vehicles have never previously been permitted?

MR STEEL: I thank Ms Carrick for her question—and long preamble. I know that she has awareness about the process that preceded the design of the CIT Woden campus and the West Plaza, which of course did include community consultation on this very matter—in the past, several years ago—about the new connection point and opportunity to make available a north-south connection between Bradley and Bowe streets. This was consulted on with the community and that feedback was taken into account in the design of the broader project and has been implemented in the construction of the project.

While it has been closed off for a period of time, it is intended that that will open up in the near future. The reason it has been closed in the interim is because of the temporary traffic arrangements associated with the temporary bus interchange, which is located

on the Matilda Street carpark on Bowes Street. But, in future, when of course the new Woden bus interchange opens, there will not be a conflict with buses and so there will be the opportunity to open that up as a local access street.

We still expect it to be a slow local access street only. It will provide people with mobility issues, particularly people with a disability, the opportunity to be dropped closer to both Woden Westfield and the CIT precinct as well as other areas of interest within the town centre. It will provide an opportunity for deliveries for some of the businesses that operate in that area. But there will also be the opportunity, should there be engagement with the government, to potentially close off that area for particular times of the week to enable things like markets to occur, if that proposal is brought forward.

MS CARRICK: Minister, how has this decision been assessed as a positive outcome under the government's outcomes-based planning system, and will the minister release that assessment so the community can understand the basis for a decision they are actively opposing through a petition?

MR STEEL: I will have to check, but I believe the planning decision was made under the old system. But I will check and come back to the Assembly if I am incorrect about that. The government is intending to do what we said we would do and what was already approved through the planning system to construct this project, including the western plaza and the connection of Bowe and Bradley streets.

This is a pedestrian-friendly area and, consistent with the Woden Town Centre Master Plan, the project created an east-west boulevard, a pedestrian boulevard, in what was the old Woden interchange, which had a road on it. We demolished that road and built a new pedestrian plaza. But in this particular section—so a different section—there will be a road connection through the centre. That has also recognised the fact that Callam Street will not be reopening to general traffic once the new bus interchange is constructed. It will be there for buses only. It will provide another north-south connection in the town centre in addition to the Easty Street connection through the town centre as well. We do not think it will be highly used by vehicles, but it is an important access point for businesses and for people with mobility issues that need to get into that area of the town centre. We will of course continue to monitor the traffic arrangements there once they are put in place.

MR EMERSON: Minister, will the government consider revisiting its decision to open this road, given the community interest in keeping it closed?

MR STEEL: We consulted with the community on this very early on in the project, and we have implemented the design that includes the road connection. We think it is going to be important as the Woden town centre grows to have this new connection through the town centre. But we will be monitoring the implementation closely.

There are some further infrastructure improvements that are planned to be made to complement the opening of the road. That is located in the section that is directly adjacent to Grand Central Towers, near the Ch-Ch-Ch-Changes cafe. That was a further bus stop. So there are some minor amendments to the verge that will be made to make sure that that can open to traffic. I will advise the community about the opening

soon, as we look forward to the opening of the new bus interchange in Woden.

Light rail stage 2B—works approval application

MR BRADDOCK: My question is to the Minister for Transport. The National Capital Authority, when discussing light rail stage 2B, often talk about how their formal consideration of the project will commence once they receive a works approval application. Approximately when does the ACT government plan, or hope, to submit a works approval application for light rail stage 2B to the NCA?

MR STEEL: We have outlined the timeline for light rail stage 2B to the Assembly and I have updated that as well. Based on the slightly later expected timeframe for the development of the final environmental impact assessment for the stage 2B project, we expect that we will need to undertake a greater level of design to be able to support that works approval. That process would begin after we finalise the EIS, which is expected around the middle of the year, at which point it will go to the commonwealth for approval.

We also know that we need to go through the process in the future of engaging with the federal parliament and the Joint Standing Committee on the National Capital and External Territories about this matter. Of course, they previously have recommended that we support a route for light rail stage 2B on Commonwealth Avenue and State Circle and that is the government's preferred route for the project. So, there are a number of approval processes that we need to work through and that includes our own, of course, development application process in the future as well. Once the EIS is completed we will then move on and progress those further approvals, including obtaining any technical advice to be able to deliver the documentation and higher level of design required for those approvals.

MR BRADDOCK: Minister, how long will it take after the EIS is completed to submit the works approval application?

MR STEEL: I thank the member for his question. I do not have an estimate with me at this particular point in time, other than what has been provided to the Assembly. So, if there is anything different to what I have provided to the Assembly, I will come back on this.

MS CLAY: Minister, are you passing through each milestone with the minimum time possible, or are you causing delays on this process?

MR STEEL: No, I am not. I am working through the approvals that we need to obtain from the commonwealth government to be able to get on with the project. Unfortunately, there have been delays in relation to the development of the final EIS, but that has not affected the timeframe for the project overall. I made that very clear in my last update to the Assembly.

Second generation anticoagulant rodenticides—restrictions

MS CLAY: My question is to the minister for the environment. I was pleased to hear the ministerial statement yesterday that the ACT government is supportive of the federal

regulator making second-generation anticoagulant rodenticides, or SGARs, a restricted chemical product. As you know, I have written to you about SGARs and asked previously if the ACT government is supportive of banning SGARs or restricting them from public sale. In a previous question on notice that you answered, you stated that the ACT was limited in banning SGARs due to the Mutual Recognition Act 1992. Given that the previous environment minister for the ACT successfully banned the sale of non animal-friendly fruit netting, with no constitutional issues with the Mutual Recognition Act, why are you unable to do the same to protect our wildlife from rodenticides?

MS ORR: In response to the member's question, the advice to me is that the mutual recognition would not allow for this. I know that the netting example that Ms Clay points to had a range of various considerations, and that they might not necessarily all hold true to other forms of product—we will call it that. I think Ms Clay's question, if my memory serves me correctly, came through before the federal decision. The federal decision coming through has updated the information from that question, as we have provided to Ms Clay, and I will refer her to my ministerial statement for the most up-to-date information on how the ACT government is progressing this matter.

MS CLAY: How will the ACT government use that 12-month period to try to make the ban permanent?

MS ORR: Mr Speaker, I think that is bordering on announcing policy in question time. So, I think we will note down Ms Clay's enthusiasm for us to look at all options and, again, refer her to my ministerial statement for information on the government's current position.

MISS NUTTALL: How long will it take for second-generation rodenticides to be removed from the shelves of Bunnings, Coles, Woolworths and other similar locations?

MS ORR: Mr Speaker, I think that is a question that requires a level of detail that will still be worked through, and perhaps somewhat hypothetical given that we are still working through all the information that is coming from the decision, from the APVMA.

Ms Clay: At your discretion, obviously, Mr Speaker, I do not think it is hypothetical given that this is an announced government program, and we are asking for the next steps, the milestones. Are we able to get that on notice?

MR SPEAKER: I am happy to ask Ms Orr if she is able to come back with more information about that.

MS ORR: Mr Speaker, the point I was going to, just for clarity, is that we have just had this progression and that we will still be working through the finer details. So, it is probably more getting ahead. If there is information I can provide, going to the question, I will come back. But I think this is a little bit too early to be providing that level of detail.

ACT Fire & Rescue—hybrid electric fire truck

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

Documents released to me under FOI show emails between ESA officials and representatives from Rosenbauer arguing over costs to the ESA for maintenance of the issue-plagued hybrid electric fire truck. In an email dated 5 March 2024, an official wrote: “We have spent more than \$2 million on just this vehicle alone.” Further correspondence shows disputes on charges for travel and repair labour

Minister, has this truck cost Canberrans more than the roughly \$1.6 million that the ACT government has previously advised?

DR PATERSON: I thank the member for the question. The truck is under warranty. So any repairs in relation to issues that we have had with the truck have been under warranty. Part of the discussion with Rosenbauer has been about extending that warranty to the end of the year, and we will continue to work with Rosenbauer to address the issues that have been facing this vehicle.

MS MORRIS: Minister, if the truck was being repaired at no cost to ESA, why was ESA arguing with Rosenbauer over invoices?

DR PATERSON: It is a warranty issue, so ESA has been having ongoing discussions with Rosenbauer over covering the costs and getting the vehicle back on the road. As Ms Morris is well aware, this has been going on for months. Negotiations have been ongoing with Rosenbauer and will continue to be.

MS BARRY: Minister, given your response, is it your response that the cost has not blown out for this truck?

DR PATERSON: To my knowledge, the costs associated with this truck are covered by warranty. If that is any different, I will come back to the Assembly.

ACT Fire & Rescue—hybrid electric fire truck

MS MORRIS: My question is to the Minister for Police, Fire and Emergency Services. On 18 February 2025, you told the Standing Committee on Legal Affairs, in answer to a question taken on notice, that the hybrid electric fire truck was under warranty and that work was “being performed by the vendor at no cost to ESA”. Documents recently released under FOI show that the ESA was disputing invoices and that the ACT had already spent over \$2 million on this vehicle. Minister, did you give the committee a false impression when you said that the truck was being repaired at no extra cost to ESA?

DR PATERSON: No, I do not believe that I did, and I just gave the same answer to the previous question. Again, if it is any different, I will come back to the Assembly, but to my knowledge the costs associated with repairs of the fire truck are covered under warranty.

MS MORRIS: Minister, is there a cost to extend the warranty?

DR PATERSON: Not to my knowledge. My understanding is that there was a negotiation with Rosenbauer to extend the warranty to the end of this year.

MR MILLIGAN: Minister, will you apologise to Canberrans for downplaying the cost and failure of this electric fire truck?

DR PATERSON: No. I think Canberrans should be very proud that we have this fire truck. There is extensive information about what this fire truck offers to both our firefighters and our community. The EV fire truck is just one pumper out of 17 in our fleet. It does form an important part of our fleet. We have talked with the fire officers, who talk about the ergonomic and work health and safety aspects of this truck that are particularly important. It offers a range of technology to the ACT to be able to fight fires. Fire & Rescue really like engaging with this truck, and we will continue to prioritise getting this truck on the road with continuous, sustainable service.

Energy—Big Canberra Battery

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: My question is to the Chief Minister.

Chief Minister, can you provide an update on the Big Canberra Battery and any progress on future large-scale battery storage in the ACT?

MR BARR: I thank Mr Werner-Gibbins for the question.

Mr Parton: He's a good man.

MR BARR: Yes; he is. I am glad he has asked this question, and I can update the Assembly.

Major civil works for the Big Canberra Battery at Williamsdale are now complete. With all 136 Tesla Megapacks having been delivered to the site, we are now progressing through the critical phase of commissioning. The battery is expected to be operational in Q4 of 2026. Final timing will, of course, depend on grid connection processes and regulatory approvals, which are now underway. Once operational, the battery will play a vital role in storing renewable energy and strengthening grid reliability by delivering 250 megawatts of power, which is enough to supply up to a third of our city for a period of two hours during a peak demand period.

The government is also working closely with Evoenergy to explore further storage solutions, including those of smaller scale, like the community battery in Dickson, which is demonstrating a commitment across the territory to a more resilient energy network and a net zero energy future.

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: Chief Minister, is there any opportunity for commonwealth investment in energy storage for the ACT?

MR BARR: There is definitely opportunity and, can I say, there has been a quite significant difference since 2022.

Mr Parton: What happened then?

MR BARR: Well, we had a federal government elected that actually recognises that there is a need to transition our energy system.

As I mentioned, the Dickson community battery is one of a number of neighbourhood battery projects that have been delivered in partnership with the federal government. These projects continue to improve the reliability of the territory's energy network by capturing excess rooftop solar during the day and supplying it back to the grid in the evenings. Importantly, Infrastructure Australia has recently placed renewable energy storage on its priority list for the ACT. We welcome this recognition because of the critical role it plays in capturing and utilising what is a growing renewable energy supply. With solar uptake continuing to increase across Canberra households and businesses, investment in storage that is supported by both levels of government will be essential in maximising these benefits.

MS TOUGH: Chief Minister, how will the uptake in household renewable energy production and storage impact Canberra households?

MR BARR: I thank Ms Tough for the supplementary. Households are indeed playing an increasing role in the energy transition. We have seen a really strong uptake in rooftop solar and increasing interest, thanks to the commonwealth's program in household battery storage. Through the Sustainable Household Scheme, we have enabled 119 megawatts of solar capacity and supported 64 megawatt hours of household battery storage. This has delivered significant cost-of-living benefits, saving more than 15,000 households a combined \$85 million on their energy bills.

We will also continue to work with the commonwealth on initiatives such as the Social Housing Energy Performance Initiative, which will ensure that public housing tenants can benefit from solar installations. And we are supporting households to invest in renewable energy, because it is a priority for the government, it is a priority for the community, and we know that all Canberrans can benefit as we make this transition to a low-emission future.

Domestic Violence Crisis Service—funding

MS CASTLEY: My question is to the Minister for the Prevention of Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence. According to a recent story in the *Canberra Times*, DVCS have been told they received 0.6 FTE for frontline workers from the ACT government, funded from a federal program. But the article says DVCS have not been able to get clarity from the minister regarding the amount of money they are receiving or how it has been provided to them. Minister, can you provide the Assembly with that information?

DR PATERSON: I will take that question on notice and get back to the Assembly.

MS CASTLEY: Minister, why haven't you been able to provide basic funding information to the organisations that are receiving the funding?

DR PATERSON: We have. I believe that DVCS and the other services that have received this commonwealth funding for the 500 workers are aware that they have a position or two. We do not get a huge allocation of funding through the commonwealth process, given the small size of our population. The allocation to the territory was 7.3 positions. These positions were spread out over a range of organisations. The

allocation to DVCS was 0.6 of an allocation of an individual, which is obviously not sufficient or okay. There is no such thing as a 0.6 of a person or position. So the ACT government topped up that position. So, ultimately, DVCS received one position; CRCC received four worker positions; YWCA received two worker positions; and mHub received one, I believe. If I have that wrong, I will get back to the Assembly.

MR CAIN: Minister, could you provide the Assembly with a profile of the federal funding received by the ACT and how that has been and will be allocated for each year of the federal policy?

DR PATERSON: The federal government just announced that they are going to expand the 500 worker program. We are currently in negotiations around what amount of funding that will mean for the territory. The way that the commonwealth allocates that funding is just a specific amount to the territory, and they leave it up to the states and territories to divide between the different services. We are currently going through that process with the commonwealth. Once that funding is clarified, we will be able to come back to the Assembly with where that funding will go.

Canberra Institute of Technology—Chief Executive Officer

MR PARTON: My question is to the minister for skills. Minister, a statement from the CIT board referenced in media reporting said:

Dr McNeill was appointed following a thorough merit-based national recruitment process which included seeking references from relevant parties.

The statement went on to say that the CIT board was aware of legal proceedings involving Dr McNeill and her former employer, and that Dr McNeill had informed the board from time to time about these matters. The board confirmed in media this morning that TAFE NSW provided references for Dr McNeill. Minister, have you seen those references, and if so will you table them?

MR PETTERSSON: I thank the Leader of the Opposition for that question. I have not seen them. I am not in possession of those documents.

MR PARTON: Minister, will you now seek copies of those references and table them in this place?

MR PETTERSSON: I will seek advice on the appropriateness of that, noting that this goes to personal privacy and ongoing HR matters, but I will take on notice the spirit of the question and I will seek advice.

MR MILLIGAN: Did the CIT board at any time inform you that they were aware of legal proceedings involving Dr McNeill and TAFE NSW prior to 17 June 2026?

MR PETTERSSON: Can Mr Milligan repeat that question? The whole of it please?

MR MILLIGAN: Did the CIT board at any time inform you that they were aware of legal proceedings involving Dr McNeill and TAFE NSW prior to 17 June 2025?

MR PETTERSSON: No.

Public schools—infrastructure

MISS NUTTALL: My question is to the minister for education. Minister, it is a bit of a shame you missed this morning's lively debate on your ministerial statement on school infrastructure. It is thoroughly worth a watch back. Minister, how did the school infrastructure audit, which your government committed to, inform the school infrastructure priorities that you listed in your ministerial statement this morning?

MS BERRY: The school audit is still continuing. About a third of the schools have been audited so far. Obviously, that will have to continue, and they will be audited as a matter of course, going forward, to understand our schools' infrastructure needs. So, it is not completed across all schools, but about a third of them have been completed. That is my understanding.

MISS NUTTALL: Minister, why were there not any infrastructure improvements listed for Tuggeranong schools?

MS BERRY: I will take on notice infrastructure upgrades at Tuggeranong schools because there may be smaller and minor repairs and maintenance work that has happened at Tuggeranong schools. If I can get that information, I can provide that back to the Assembly.

MS CLAY: Minister, will you publicly release the results of this audit? And, if so, when?

MS BERRY: Once the audit is completed, I will seek advice on whether I can publicise it. It really is for the education directorate and for schools to understand school infrastructure. But it is incomplete, and so I will wait until it is completed and then seek advice on its publication.

Mr Barr: This gives us an early mark; very productive. All further questions can be placed on the notice paper, Mr Speaker.

Supplementary answers to questions without notice Domestic Violence Crisis Service—funding

DR PATERSON: I have a few matters. I have just found the quote that Ms Castley was referencing. This is in relation to the distribution of the 500 Workers Initiative funding that the federal government announced a couple of weeks ago. As I said in the answer to Mr Cain's question, this will be an ongoing discussion. We are negotiating with the commonwealth government around the extent of the funding, and, once we are aware of that, we will be able to talk to our services around what that may look like.

To clarify the answer to the second question, I said the ACT was allocated 7.2 full-time equivalents. It is 7.6 full-time equivalents. Four full-time equivalent positions were allocated to the Canberra Rape Crisis Centre, two to YWCA Canberra, one to the Multicultural Hub, and 0.6 to the Domestic Violence Crisis Service. Since 2022-23, the ACT has received \$2.495 million under the 500 Workers Initiative and contributed a

further \$0.776 million to bring that total investment to \$3.27 million to enable an increase of frontline workers across key community sector organisations.

ACT Fire & Rescue—hybrid electric fire truck

DR PATERSON: Regarding Ms Morris's question around the \$2 million quote that she read, this was an inaccurate comment made by a staff member. As Ms Morris said, the vehicle cost the ACT \$1.6 million. There were some extras, such as vehicle wrap and colours, added to the vehicle when it arrived in Australia. That probably put the cost up to around \$1.9 million, but no other costs have been paid, and it is under warranty. I stand by my answers to the questions and the questions from the committee.

Public schools—infrastructure

MS BERRY: I have a list of Tuggeranong schools that have had confirmed Asset Renewal Program works. That includes Calwell Primary, Campbell High, Fadden Primary, Gowrie Primary and Hughes Primary. If there are any that I have left off the list, I will provide them to the Assembly.

Canberra Institute of Technology—Chief Executive Officer

MR PETTERSSON: In relation to the question from Ms Lee, I sought advice and can confirm that ACT taxpayers did not pay legal fees for Dr McNeill in the matters referenced, and ACT taxpayers are not paying for the costs order.

Second generation anticoagulant rodenticides—restrictions

MS ORR: In relation to Ms Clay's questions and Miss Nuttall's supplementary, on when products will be off shelves, the APVMA announced that the registration of all products containing SGARs would be suspended for one year from 24 March 2026, and, during the suspension period, SGAR products may only be supplied or used in accordance with the instructions published in the APVMA *Gazette No 5*, which was done on Tuesday, 10 March 2026, or a specified notice issued to each product holder. I hope that provides more information on how products will be made publicly available during the suspension period.

Access Mental Health Team

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: Yesterday, Mr Parton asked about the Access Mental Health telephone line. I will come back in detail on notice, but I just want to provide a level of assurance to the Assembly and some further information about the specific incident that Mr Parton raised. It was the result of an interruption to the service on the evening of 29 January 2026. The Belconnen Community Health Centre experienced an unplanned power outage that disrupted the Access Mental Health Team telephone and computer systems that work out of the Belconnen Community Health Centre during the day and into the evening. A code yellow was activated in relation to the power outage on 29 January. This was activated at approximately 1900 hours and stood down at 2012 hours.

The Access Mental Health Team phone line is managed through a Webex system and,

during a power outage, all incoming calls through the Webex system should automatically divert to a designated backup mobile phone to allow clinicians to continue responding to incoming calls. On this occasion, unfortunately, the backup phone diverted to a second device and it appears it may also have been diverted.

Several corrective actions have been implemented following this incident on 29 January. The diversion fault has now been resolved and the Canberra Health Services communications team has established a stable automated arrangement. In addition, a business continuity plan for power outages will be strengthened following the installation of a business continuity plan computer at the Belconnen Community Health Centre.

CHS has reviewed the timestamps from the screenshots provided by the constituent of her attempted calls to access the Mental Health Team on 29 January and can confirm that these align with the period during which the power outage occurred and the code yellow was activated. The team manager contacted the constituent on 5 March to discuss the correspondence.

I am following up with Canberra Health Services as to why it took so long to respond to the constituent's concerns that were first raised on 30 January. That is not in line with my expectations, but I hope that this provides at least some assurance that the situation, as Mr Parton described it, is not the normal situation with Access Mental Health.

Government procurement—kerbside waste collection

MS CHEYNE: Mr Speaker, I did not want to prove you wrong, but I have on this occasion. This is in response to a question I took on notice from Ms Lee earlier in the week, where she asked me for some details about a tender. At the time, I said that I thought it would be commercial in confidence but I would take it on notice and seek advice and come back either way. I can confirm that, under the procurement requirements, individual tender information, including pricing, is commercial in confidence and cannot be disclosed.

Canberra Institute of Technology—Chief Executive Officer—order to table documents

MR PARTON: Pursuant to standing order 213, which states “A document quoted from by a Member may be ordered by the Assembly to be presented; the order may be made without notice immediately upon the conclusion of the speech of the Member who has quoted from the document,” I seek your guidance. I understand that Mr Pettersson, during question time yesterday, agreed to table some documents. In particular, he spoke of the tabling of correspondence with CIT in relation to this matter. It is my understanding, on the basis of the answers that were given by Mr Pettersson today, that he was indeed quoting from said document. Pursuant to standing order 213, I call for that correspondence to be tabled in this Assembly.

MR SPEAKER: Could I clarify that you are referring to question time yesterday, Mr Parton, and the document that the minister said he would table. Is that the one you are referring to?

MR PARTON: I am referring to that, but it is certainly our belief that that document was referred to by Mr Pettersson in answers today, so, pursuant to standing order 213, we are calling for that correspondence to be tabled.

MR SPEAKER: I will take that on notice and I will get back to the Assembly on that. I will seek some further advice. A point of order, Mr Pettersson?

Mr Pettersson: To try to be of assistance, perhaps Mr Parton could be a bit more specific about the point in time or the particular reference he is referring to. I have already expressed my complete willingness to provide the chamber with all of those communications. I am trying to be of assistance, so perhaps he could be more specific.

MR PARTON: I am happy to cut through the BS on this, if you want, Mr Speaker. We understand that, under the standing orders pertaining to question time, we potentially have a 30-day wait on the tabling of that correspondence from yesterday, and we think that this matter needs to be examined before the next 30 days. I am trying to do whatever is within the capability that we have, regarding the standing orders. I concede the minister has been most helpful. He is the one who actually said he would table the correspondence. I am just hoping to escalate that process.

MR SPEAKER: I understand. Ultimately, the minister said he would table a document, but I am not sure if he was referring to that document during the question. You have just asked for a piece of correspondence and he said he would table it. The standing orders are pretty silent on it, but, if it were taken as a question on notice, he has to respond within 30 days. I am not sure that he actually had a document that he was reading and quoting from. Yesterday, you asked for the correspondence he provided to CIT, as I understand it. I do not think that, in this case, standing order 213 applies. Ultimately, you have asked for a document that was provided by CIT. Ultimately, the minister has 30 days, but what I would say is that he has indicated that he will endeavour to get the document a bit sooner. I think that is what he indicated.

Mr Pettersson: Yes, Mr Speaker. I did indicate that that was a matter of urgency for me. I am currently awaiting advice on the appropriateness of the disclosure of certain documents. It is my intent to be able to disclose everything. I am seeking advice to enable that.

Legislative Assembly—standing order 130

MS TOUGH: I am seeking your guidance on standing order 130. I am not disputing your ruling on anticipating business on the notice paper, but I have looked at the standing orders online and the copy that is in the drawer, which I know is slightly out of date. I noticed that it is still in the standing orders that you cannot anticipate debate, so I am just wondering when it was removed.

MR SPEAKER: Thank you, Ms Tough. The advice I have is that standing order 130 does not refer to a question without notice; it refers to amendments, a speech in adjournment debates, and so on.

MS TOUGH: I was not disputing your ruling. In giving your advice, you said that we had removed the standing order to stop the anticipation of debate, and that has not been

removed. That is why I am clarifying.

MR SPEAKER: The advice is that, yes, in a general sense, that is correct. The standing order that I was referring to, based on advice, relates to questions. You can ask a question without notice that relates to debate. That is fine. That is the standing order that was removed—standing order 117(f)—but you cannot, in the normal course of debates, move amendments or make speeches that would interfere. We removed the standing order referring to a question without notice but not the other standing order with regard to other debate in this place. Does that make it clear?

MS TOUGH: That does. Thank you, Mr Speaker.

MR SPEAKER: Maybe we have all learnt something.

Public Accounts and Administration—Standing Committee Reference

MR PARTON (Brindabella—Leader of the Opposition) (3.06): I seek leave to move the motion standing in my name that has been circulated but does not appear on the notice paper, regarding the CIT's CEO.

Leave not granted.

Standing orders—suspension

MR PARTON (Brindabella—Leader of the Opposition) (3.06): I move:

That so much of the standing orders be suspended as would prevent Mr Parton from moving a motion.

We are dealing with a matter which is live and at the forefront of many in community, and I think it needs to be dealt with now. I am frustrated, as I know many members of this Assembly are, that we have another CIT plane crash happening before our eyes, but that we, as an Assembly, are not able to properly prosecute the issues that we see before us. We know that Dr McNeill became the CEO of CIT on 18 June last year. We know, as the minister did then—

Mr Barr: Mr Speaker, on a point of order: he is debating his motion, not the reason for suspending the standing orders.

MR SPEAKER: It is a fine line, I accept. Mr Parton, I remind you that this is a debate about the suspension, not about the substantive motion that you are moving, so restrict your comments directly to why we should seek to suspend standing orders.

MR PARTON: I appreciate that, Mr Speaker. I think that the timeliness of this goes to the specific committee in question—that being the PAC committee—and the fact that the tenure of the current chair of the CIT board ends at, I think, the end of this month. So we believe that, if we are going to get to the bottom of this as an Assembly and as a community, we need to ask questions to the right people and we need to ask them as soon as we possibly can.

It does not surprise me that the Chief Minister and the Labor government are not keen for further scrutiny on this issue, because they have never been all that keen on scrutiny of matters like this, and obviously an inquiry of this nature is potentially going to be politically damaging. But we think it is in the public's interest for these matters to be prosecuted and for members of this chamber to have the ability to question not just the minister but also the board.

Mr Petterson, in his statements over the last couple of days has, on a number of occasions, reached a point where he puts his hand out and says, "No. These are all decisions that were made by the board," and moves away from the very clear position that (a) the remuneration of the CIT CEO is a taxpayer funded position, and (b), as the minister, he has ultimate carriage over that board.

Mr Barr: Mr Speaker, on a point of order again: he is debating his motion, not why we should be suspending standing orders.

MR PARTON: I have no more to add. Thank you, Mr Speaker.

Mr Steel: Mr Speaker, on another point of order: I am just asking what the question is, because he has not been very clear about which standing orders he is actually referring to.

MR SPEAKER: The question is with regard to a motion to suspend standing orders.

Mr Steel: The entirety of standing orders will not apply—is that what he is saying—or to suspend so much of standing orders as would prevent him from moving the motion?

MR SPEAKER: As I understand it, that is correct, Mr Steel.

Mr Steel: That is not what he said. He needs to be clear about that.

MR SPEAKER: The motion is to suspend so much of standing orders as would prevent Mr Parton from moving his motion.

MR BARR (Kurrajong—Chief Minister, Minister for Economic Development and Minister for Tourism and Trade) (3.10): On that motion, what we should be discussing is the irony that this has been presented in question time with the heading "Notice of motion". The idea that there is any notice of motion is somewhat fanciful. The Assembly sits next Tuesday. This is an item of Assembly business that seeks to refer certain matters to the Standing Committee on Public Accounts and Administration for inquiry.

So, unless Mr Parton is of the view that that standing committee is going to meet tomorrow and then call for public hearings on Monday next week, there is no difference if this motion is considered as part of Assembly business on Tuesday morning, in four days, when Assembly members have had the opportunity to consider the motion to potentially move amendments to either the terms of reference or some of the information contained within. We are all largely taking that on face value, having had the benefit of less than an hour to look at it.

That is not how this Assembly usually establishes inquiries before committees. If this is the approach that is now going to be taken in this place—that you dump a notice of motion during question time and then seek to, immediately after question time, suspend standing orders; that you dump your own business that you have had on the notice paper all week—it is not how it should occur.

If, for example, there were no parliamentary sittings for months, there would be reason to suspend standing orders. Presumably, regarding good practice and, I guess, being cordial and courteous to other members of the Assembly, you would do it at the end of PMB, so there were at least a few hours to consider the content. But we are meeting again next Tuesday, where Assembly business will be listed, and this would be a perfectly legitimate item. If we do determine not to suspend standing orders right now, we have a notice of motion and we could consider it next Tuesday morning. If members determine to send this to the committee, the committee could then meet at Tuesday lunchtime, with notice of this motion, to determine its next steps.

But there is no need to suspend standing orders now. It is not fair to Assembly members who have not seen this motion, and we are sitting again next Tuesday. On Tuesday morning, in Assembly business, we could consider this appropriately, and that is what I think the Assembly should do. That is the general way we have run this place. The tradition of at least giving notice is helpful. That is what this is meant to be: a notice of motion. We should debate it on Tuesday. We should not support the suspension of standing orders now.

MR BRADDOCK (Yerrabi) (3.13): Normally, the Greens would want to see motions of this type on the notice paper to allow sufficient consideration and detailed examination by members. The Leader of the Opposition has made the case for urgency—unfortunately not as articulately in the chamber as he did in private. I will talk to some of his points now.

Based on comments that Ms Lundy made to ABC Radio this morning, she was responsible for this particular recruitment. Ms Lundy should have the opportunity to fully answer questions from the committee and this Assembly in terms of the governance of the particular recruitment process. Noting her period on the CIT board is due to expire in a very short period of time, the Greens will be supporting this particular suspension of standing orders. It should be noted that the Greens' concerns are heightened given Ms Lundy was a former ALP senator and was appointed repeatedly by Labor ministers. Therefore, we need to ensure she has the opportunity to answer questions from this Assembly about the process.

MR PETTERSSON (Yerrabi—Minister for Business, Arts and Creative Industries, Minister for Children, Youth and Families, Minister for Multicultural Affairs and Minister for Skills, Training and Industrial Relations) (3.14): I want to start by thanking Mr Parton for bringing this motion forward. I normally try to assume the best of intentions from all members in this place, and I appreciate all members who have asked questions in relation to recent events at CIT. I understand their keen interest in these matters, for many reasons. I hope that, central to all of them, there is a commitment to a strong vocational education system in the ACT.

I have tried to be nothing but be forthcoming when it comes to my answers in this place in relation to these matters. In that spirit, I have a very open mind on the matters that Mr Parton has brought forward in this motion.

I note that Mr Braddock mentioned that he was having private conversations about this matter. As the minister responsible, I too would have appreciated a conversation about these matters. It is incredibly telling, to me, that there have been no conversations with me, but, it appears, there have been conversations with others in this place. That, to me, speaks to intentions that maybe do not align with the best in regard to these matters.

I appreciate that members in this place do want answers. That is entirely appropriate. As the minister, I would appreciate being given the opportunity to seek advice on the appropriateness of an inquiry of this nature, and its effect on matters that members claim to be concerned about. As members would be aware, as they are well versed in media reporting, there are legal matters still afoot. I do not believe that this would necessarily create an entire impediment to the inquiry into these matters, but it does require proper consideration before an investigation and inquiry of this nature is launched.

It is for those reasons that, with respect to giving this chamber some time, and giving me as minister some level of involvement in these negotiations—whilst I appreciate that maybe there is a political stitch-up afoot here—I would hope that all members do appreciate the gravity of these matters and that it would be considered in how they vote on this matter.

MR EMERSON(Kurrajong) (3.17): I am sympathetic to some of the concerns that have been raised from a process perspective here, and would ask, wherever possible, for members to be given more notice with respect to motions, particularly regarding the establishment of committee inquiries, given the level of work required. I do not know what the value is in a political stitch-up for government in other members not being provided with more notice, if that is the intent.

With all of that said, I think this is an urgent matter. I indicated, upon circulation of the motion, that I was supportive of it being considered today, and said as much to the Leader of the Opposition and Mr Rattenbury, in order, hopefully, to inform their positions. I am not sure whether Ms Carrick will be speaking; I understand she is of the same view. The benefit of considering this matter today is that it gives the community some sense of assurance that this Assembly is exercising its parliamentary scrutiny functions to a level that would be expected, given the severity or seriousness of the concerns that have been raised. For that reason, I am supportive of us debating this motion this afternoon.

MS CARRICK (Murrumbidgee) (3.18): I support what Mr Braddock and Mr Emerson have said. While I have concerns about process and timeframes, this is a serious matter, and I will be supporting the debate on this motion.

MS STEPHEN-SMITH (Kurrajong—Minister for Health, Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Finance and Minister for the Public Service) (3.18): I have to admit to a level of confusion here, Mr Speaker. As my colleague Ms Orr has pointed out, this motion is dated 23 February 2026. Yes, it was circulated today, but the date on the

bottom of it is 23 February 2026.

Mr Parton: On a point of order, Mr Speaker.

MR SPEAKER: Could you stop the clocks? This is a finite debate and, if we are going to have points of order, we should stop the clocks.

Mr Parton: On a point of order, I would like to point out to Ms Stephen-Smith that the master copy, which is with the Speaker at the moment, has today's date on it. I think you can confirm that, Mr Speaker.

MR SPEAKER: I am able to confirm that he has—

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: He has corrected the date?

MR SPEAKER: corrected the date, so there is no point of order as such.

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I am not making a point of order; I am speaking to the motion that is before the Assembly.

MR SPEAKER: I was referring to Mr Parton, but you can carry on. Start the clocks again.

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: My second point of confusion here is: if there have been so many discussions between the Liberal Party and the Greens political party, and they understood that Ms Carrick was supporting this motion, I am confused as to why the committee itself did not simply determine to investigate this matter. The committee comprises a Liberal member, a Greens member, Ms Carrick and Ms Tough. Clearly, there is a non-Labor majority on this committee, and the committee could have met and determined this matter for itself. This is, clearly and simply, a process of political grandstanding. That is fine, but I think we should call it for what it is.

MS TOUGH (Brindabella) (3.20): I rise to speak as the Labor member of the Public Accounts and Administration Committee. I note that, in the motion, the name of the committee is wrong, but I will let that pass. It appears that everyone else on the committee, except me, knew that this motion was coming today. It is what it is. I am looking at my calendar, Mr Speaker, and the public accounts committee is not due to meet until 2 pm on 30 March. We have three sitting days left before then. If we are to try and have a meeting before 30 March, without going into what happens in other committees that I am on—I note that other members of that committee are on other committees with me—there are not many business hours between now and then when that committee could urgently meet, unless we choose to meet during lunchtime on a sitting day, which is something that could happen.

I echo the Chief Minister's concerns that it is a sitting fortnight. We are three days into a sitting fortnight. There are three more days next week when this could be brought on as Assembly business, when the whole Assembly has notice of the motion and can consider it, because the public accounts committee is not scheduled to meet until Monday, 30 March.

The time for the debate having expired, the question was put.

Question resolved in the affirmative, with the concurrence of an absolute majority.

Public Accounts and Administration—Standing Committee Reference

MR PARTON (Brindabella—Leader of the Opposition) (3.22): I move:

That this Assembly:

(1) notes:

- (a) on 4 June 2025, Chair of the Board of the Canberra Institute of Technology (CIT) announced the appointment of Dr Margot McNeill as the new CEO of CIT;
- (b) on 18 June 2025, Dr Margot McNeill commenced in her role as CEO of CIT;
- (c) media reported on 17 March 2026 that:
 - (i) Dr McNeill had been under investigation for allegations of “serious misconduct” arising out of complaints made against her in her previous employment at TAFE NSW in May 2024;
 - (ii) Dr McNeill had been placed on “special leave” from November 2024 and did not perform any duties at all;
 - (iii) between May 2025 and December 2025, Dr McNeill participated in the investigation by TAFE NSW;
 - (iv) Dr McNeill was informed on 16 September 2025 that TAFE NSW had made a finding that her conduct was in breach of the TAFE NSW Code of Conduct;
 - (v) on 11 December 2025; Dr McNeill was notified that TAFE NSW determined her employment was terminated “due to substantiated findings of misconduct”; (vi) on 14 January 2026, Dr McNeill filed an application in the NSW Industrial Relations Commission for unfair dismissal;
 - (vii) on 13 March 2026, the NSW Industrial Relations Commission made a finding in favour of TAFE NSW including awarding costs against Dr McNeill for TAFE NSW;
- (d) in Question Time on 18 March 2026, the Minister for Skills, Training and Industrial Relations, Michael Pettersson, confirmed that:
 - (i) he was made aware that Dr McNeill was under investigation for serious misconduct on 17 June 2025;
 - (ii) he had referred the matter to “relevant authorities” and had commenced an independent review; into the due diligence of the recruitment process;
 - (iii) he was notified by the Board of CIT on 19 December 2025 that TAFE NSW had made a finding that Dr McNeill had breached TAFE NSW’s Code of Conduct;
- (e) on radio on 19 March 2026, Chair of the CIT Board, Kate Lundy, confirmed that Dr McNeill had not disclosed she was under investigation

for serious misconduct at the time she applied for the role of CEO of CIT;

(2) further notes:

- (a) CIT is the ACT's premier public vocational training institute and provides an essential service in delivering training in essential and key skills for the workforce of the future;
- (b) public confidence in CIT is crucial;
- (c) in announcing the appointment of Dr McNeill as the new CEO of CIT, the Chair of the Board of CIT, Kate Lundy, stated that "CIT "was so ready to turn a corner" after the former chief executive was found to have engaged in serious corrupt conduct;

(3) calls on the Standing Committee on Public Accounts and Administration to inquire into the following matters:

- (a) the effectiveness of the due diligence processes of the Board of CIT in the recruitment of Dr McNeil;
- (b) whether Dr McNeill has breached the Financial Management Act 1996 in failing to disclose she was under investigation for "serious misconduct" at the time she applied for the role;
- (c) whether the Board has breached its duties under the Financial Management Act 1996 in relation to the recruitment of Dr McNeill;
- (d) whether the Minister for Skills, Training and Industrial Relations has discharged his obligation in his duty of oversight of the Board; and
- (e) any other related matters.

We have already discussed the reasons that we believe this is important to get to, and to get to now. We know that Dr Margot McNeill became the CEO of CIT on 18 June last year. We know, as the minister did then, that Dr McNeill had been under investigation for allegations of serious misconduct arising from complaints made against her in her previous employment. We know that Dr McNeill was placed on special leave from November 2024 and was not performing duties as such. We know that Dr McNeill was informed on 16 September last year that she was found in breach of the TAFE NSW Code of Conduct.

We also know that, in December last year, Dr McNeill was notified that TAFE NSW had determined that her employment was terminated due to substantial findings of misconduct. We know that Dr McNeill filed an application in the New South Wales Industrial Relations Commission for unfair dismissal. That was on 14 January this year. We know that, last week, the IRC made a finding in that matter in favour of TAFE NSW, including awarding costs against Dr McNeill. We know that the minister became aware of these allegations prior to the start date for Dr McNeill.

On radio this morning, Mr Petterson attempted to distance himself from this saga by saying that all the decisions were made by the independent board, and he stated that the board do not answer to him; but, ultimately, they kind of do.

We are moving this motion today because we believe that members of this Assembly should be given the opportunity to ask questions of the board and the minister in the

context of a hearing, and we have referred it specifically to PAC because we want to know whether Dr McNeill has breached the Financial Management Act in failing to disclose that she was under investigation for serious misconduct at the time that she applied for the role. Additionally, we think that, as the end of the tenure of the current chair of the board is approaching very quickly, it is extremely timely that we pull the trigger on this and move as quickly as we possibly can.

I commend the motion to the Assembly.

MR PETTERSSON (Yerrabi—Minister for Business, Arts and Creative Industries, Minister for Children, Youth and Families, Minister for Multicultural Affairs and Minister for Skills, Training and Industrial Relations) (3.24): As I indicated in the debate on the motion to suspend standing orders, the government does not have a fundamental opposition to this line of inquiry. I personally hold the value of parliamentary inquiries in the highest esteem and, as I have indicated previously, I value the interest of members in this place in the affairs of CIT.

CIT have an important role to play in the life of this city; it is important that they play that role well. I appreciate that members may hold a view that CIT is not performing those functions well or appropriately and may seek to inquire into it. That is not a concern to me, and it is something that I welcome. As I have when I have answered questions in question time, I have done what I can to be helpful, with the information that I have available to me. I will continue to do that, because that is my job and that is my responsibility.

I appreciate that members will ask questions. Sometimes they will ask questions with more pure intent than others, but, in this situation, I need, once again, to place on the record my deep frustration that it appears that Mr Parton did not see any value in talking to me, the responsible minister, about this motion before surprising us with it in the chamber.

As I think is shown by my answers in question time and my willingness to try and aid the opposition in their lines of inquiry, I am very open to working alongside members in this place to ensure that CIT functions well. I will not resile from that. I want to work collaboratively in that pursuit. But it is challenging to continue to hold that belief in a pure intent when it is very clear that there was a coordinated effort on this one.

Mr Parton made reference to me having read from notes in question time. I did make reference, as others were speaking to the motion on the suspension of standing orders, that they all had prepared speeches. It is not like they did not have time to communicate with me that they would be seeking to move this motion. They could have, and they made a very deliberate choice not to do so.

I would be very curious to understand why they made that choice. I have not seen anything in the lines of questioning that speaks to a reason for them holding that view. I can only think of one, which is sheer politics and opportunism. I guess that is two reasons; apologies. I can only think of those reasons as to why I, as the responsible minister, and the government were not consulted on those matters.

In the debate on the motion to suspend standing orders, I raised what I think were very

appropriate concerns about proceeding down this path—not to dissuade from doing an inquiry, but to ensure that an inquiry is done appropriately and does not impede what I believe the intent of this inquiry is.

As members would be aware from my answers in question time, there is currently an independent review taking place into this process. These things can occur concurrently, but it does present challenges, in the midst of ongoing legal challenges, as to how this parliament navigates an inquiry of this nature without somehow impeding the result that I believe members are seeking.

That is for this parliament to navigate, but it will be very clear to the wider community that, if there are any issues raised or caused by the hasty way this parliament has proceeded with this inquiry, it will fall upon this moment right now, when we have decided to launch an inquiry without giving people the ability to engage constructively on these matters, which I have always endeavoured to do, and will continue to do.

I look forward to my engagement with this inquiry. I will continue to offer as much assistance as I can to members. I hope that this inquiry does not have the unintended consequences that are a real possibility when it comes to rushing an inquiry of this nature.

MR EMERSON (Kurrajong) (3.29): I want to speak very briefly in support of this inquiry. If it is of any comfort to the minister, I was not given any notice either. I was ambushed as much as you were. I would request that in future additional notice is provided to members to be able to consider, not just in this case, whether or not an inquiry should occur—I am supporting this motion because I believe it should—but also to look through the terms of reference and the other notes and ensure the validity of the motion. With all of that said, I hope to see the opposition support any similar initiatives in the future from other members of the Assembly where they feel a matter is urgent enough to justify a suspension of standing orders and to be considered in an afternoon, as this is being considered today.

This is a critical matter to investigate. I do appreciate and thank the minister for having mentioned the independent investigation that is occurring, but I believe community members also will expect broader oversight from this Assembly from multiple different representatives within the Assembly to ensure that this kind of thing stops happening at CIT. This is deeply concerning. Reports that the board was not informed that these investigations into allegations of serious misconduct were occurring from the appointee's current employer at the time of the recruitment process, I think, warrant serious consideration and investigation and also swift action—slow action having been one of the serious concerns of what we had seen in response to the allegations levelled at and substantiated against the former CEO of CIT.

Again, yes there are concerns with the process—and I hope that we do not have an ambush inquiries stood up during question time or right after question time as a habit moving forward—but I do very much support this investigation and look forward participating in it and seeing what we uncover.

MR BRADDOCK (Yerrabi) (3.31): I would like to thank the Leader of the Opposition for this motion today. I also share concerns about the appointment which need to be

examined further, which is why the Greens will be supportive of this inquiry. While I do note that the minister has provided full and frank answers and assurances to provide further information—for which I am appreciative of, in particular the independent review, which I hope can be provided in as timely a fashion as possible—I am particularly concerned that, given the CIT board recent experience and repeated assurances they have made to this Assembly via their respective ministers and in-person at hearings, they have not improved their governance processes to the extent to which they have assured us they have. This experience has demonstrated that the governance processes still have issues. Therefore, the minister and the board should be held to account to ensure that the CIT is effectively governed and managed.

In the comments the minister just made, he said that, if anyone wants to do a standing order 213, they are free to do so and agrees to not reach a position until after the circulation of this particular motion. I have circulated some amendments and I will just talk to those now. My first amendment “calls” and replaces it with “requests”—the reason being out of respect for the workload of members of the committee. I do not want to see a situation where the Assembly is effectively directing the workloads of the committees, sometimes to the detriment of what they are trying to achieve. The second amendment is just to provide a report back, to ensure that we get the information back to this Assembly as to what the committee found.

I seek leave to move both amendments as circulated in my name together.

Leave granted.

MR BRADDOCK: I move:

1. In paragraph (3), omit “calls”, substitute: “requests”.
2. Add:
“(4) requests the Standing Committee on Public Accounts and Administration to report back to the Assembly by 4 May 2026”.

MR PARTON (Brindabella—Leader of the Opposition) (3.34), in reply: I have already supported the amendments. I would say to Mr Pettersson that I listened to the minister on the radio this morning and, using the voice recognition as I was driving, said, “Call Mickey P,” and then I said, “No, no, no.” I take on board the words that you have expressed today and perhaps I should have let it go through and we should have had a chat this morning—but that is on me. Nevertheless, I think what we are doing here is what the majority of the residents that have installed us here in this Assembly would want us to do. We certainly will be supporting the amendments from Mr Braddock—and let’s move on.

Original question, as amended, resolved in the affirmative.

Papers

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

Active travel plan—Improvement and reporting—Assembly resolution of

25 September 2025—Government response, dated March 2026.

Subordinate legislation (including explanatory statements unless otherwise stated)

Legislation Act, pursuant to section 64—

Remuneration Tribunal Act—Remuneration Tribunal (Fees and Allowances of Members) Determination 2026—Disallowable Instrument DI2026-17 (LR, 10 March 2026).

ACT Policing—resourcing

MS MORRIS (Brindabella) (3.35): I move:

That this Assembly:

- (1) notes that:
 - (a) violent crime and perceptions of crime have gone up over 10 years from 2015-2016 to 2024-2025 where:
 - (i) the ACT saw the largest shift in community concerns about crime in Australia, according to Roy Morgan research which found that 51 percent of Canberrans were concerned about crime in 2024-2025, up from 34 percent in 2015-2016, a decade rise of 17 percentage points; and
 - (ii) offences against the person including homicide, assaults, grievous and actual bodily harm, sexual assaults and kidnapping have gone up by 29 percent over the decade, according to ACT Policing annual reports. This increase exceeds population growth. Sexual offences have increased by 42 percent; and
 - (b) data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics show the number of victims of assault in the ACT rose from 1,728 in 2014 to 2,482 in 2024;
- (2) further notes that the Government:
 - (a) commitment per person to policing has gone backwards over 10 years from 2015-2016 to 2024-2025 where the:
 - (i) ACT was the only Australian jurisdiction to decrease its expenditure on policing per person from \$531.68 in 2015-2016 to \$523.19 in 2024-2025, with the national average of expenditure on policing per person increasing to \$652 from \$574 in 2015-2016; and
 - (ii) Government decreased the number of operational sworn police per 100,000 people from 173 in 2015-2016 to 169 in 2024-2025; and
 - (b) has failed over many years to adequately maintain and, where necessary, replace crucial police facilities including the City Police Station and the Winchester Centre; and
- (3) affirms that the Government's neglect and decade-long underinvestment in ACT Policing have made Canberrans less safe.

Last year, the Canberra Liberals leader, Mark Parton, and I visited a young couple in their home in the Lanyon Valley and, when we arrived at their house, there was no front door. The door had been removed, and a tradie was busily working away on the doorframe. We stepped over the tools and the dust and into the home, where we sat

down with the lovely young couple, who then told us their story. There was no front door because, not long before our meeting with this young couple, their home had been violently invaded in the dead of night, with their front door taking the first round of gunfire.

The scenes that followed are harrowing and should never happen anywhere, but certainly not in a place like Canberra. Rather than me recounting their experience of masked gunmen breaking into their home, I want to share their experience as accounted by the husband, who said:

During this incident, I sustained a gunshot wound to my leg and was violently assaulted. My pregnant wife, who was expecting high-risk twins, was forced to drag me into a bedroom after I lost consciousness, while two armed intruders moved through our home. Despite her own vulnerability, she managed to call emergency services and apply pressure to my wound until help arrived. This traumatic event has left both my wife and me struggling to recover physically, emotionally and financially, and we feel that the support provided to us in the aftermath has been gravely insufficient.

As you can appreciate, experiencing such violence has left lasting impacts on our lives. Beyond the immediate physical injuries, there are ongoing challenges with trauma, loss of income and the need for proper counselling and support services. Unfortunately, the current system had not provided the help we so desperately needed at that time, and my wife needed to organise it herself as she was struggling with the trauma effects on her pregnancy. I believe that no victim of a crime this serious should feel abandoned or unsupported. This is not just an issue about my wife and me; it affects many victims of crime across our territory who are left to suffer in silence without proper support.

There is a growing number of victims of violent crime in Canberra—victims like this young Lanyon Valley couple who were weeks away from meeting their baby twins. It should have been a very happy and wholesome time in their lives. Instead, they welcomed baby boys into a home that was reeling from physical and psychological trauma, stress and disruption in their lives—not to mention the physical damage done to their home.

At every stage of this young couple's journey, since their home was violently invaded, they have encountered difficulty in obtaining support and justice. Regrettably, I am acutely aware that my motion does not go to fixing any of the issues and injustices that they have experienced, and I am sorry for that and for the countless victims in Canberra who are like them. But I do seek to use this motion to bring to the attention of the Assembly a worrying trend of crime against the person rising in Canberra.

Prime data confirms that the specific experience of violent crime against an innocent family in Lanyon Valley is part of an increasing ACT-wide problem. Over the past decade, violent crime against Canberrans has surged, while support for our local policing has gone backwards over the same period. Data from ACT Policing shows that offences against the person, including homicide, assault, grievous and actual bodily harm, sexual assaults and kidnapping have gone up by 29 per cent over the decade—faster than the population increase of 20 per cent. Over the same period, the ACT saw

the largest shift—larger than any other jurisdiction in Australia—in community concerns about crime. According to research by Roy Morgan, 51 per cent of Canberrans were concerned about crime in 2024-25, which was up from 34 per cent a decade ago, in 2015-16. So, over the decade, we have seen violent crime go up 29 per cent and concerns about crime go up by 34 per cent. It is an extraordinary surge in community concern about crime, and it reflects the data.

Yesterday's release of crime data by the Australian Bureau of Statistics reports that in 2024-25—and, again, I am going to quote—"the most common principal offence in the Australian Capital Territory was acts intended to cause injury or to reach the highest number recorded in the time series, with 971 offenders." The ABS data shows a 30 per cent increase in the last decade. More specifically, it shows that the number of acts intended to cause injury broadly stabilised at around 700 offences in the second half of the 2010s but, since then, numbers have taken off. The ABS noted that 2024-25 had the highest number recorded in the time series. The year before that was the second highest and the year before that was the third highest. So the trajectory is very clear. During this time, a separate category of violent crime, sexual assault, nearly tripled. Let's remember that behind all of these numbers and statistics are real people, real Canberrans like the young Lanyon Valley couple and their babies, who are the victims of these violent crimes. It is against this backdrop of increasing levels of violent crime in our community that this motion is being brought to the attention of the Assembly.

As our police do their utmost to respond to the increase in violent crime, they are hampered by operating from increasingly dysfunctional facilities, with lower expenditure on policing per head of population and with a decrease in the number of sworn officers. The dysfunctional facilities include the City Police Station and Winchester Centre, both of which have had widespread media coverage, yet again, this time for leaking roofs, collapsing ceilings and water damage. Not that long ago, the City Police Station had raw sewerage running through parts of the building, including the ACT Watch House. A report released just this month, under the ACT National Preventive Mechanism, found that Woden and Gungahlin police stations are not fit for custodial purposes and Belconnen and Tuggeranong police stations are not suitable as medium- to longer-term detention facilities. This is particularly concerning if the ACT Watch House becomes inoperable due to its many faults. The problems with police facilities have been well known for a long time.

On top of this, the ACT has been decreasing its expenditure on policing per head of population from \$532 to \$523 in the last 10 years. We are the only Australian jurisdiction to do this. The decrease in per head expenditure has been matched by a decrease in the number of sworn officers per 100,000 ACT residents from 173 10 years ago to 169 now. So, while violent crime is going up, support for our police has clearly been going backwards. Under these conditions, the professionalism and dedication of our police is tested. The neglect and under-funding shown by this government must undermine the efficiency and effectiveness of our policing. It causes stress and burnout among our police officers and, importantly, it is making Canberrans less safe.

It is for this reason that I have brought this motion today. The 10-year trend is clear. While support for our police from this government has gone backwards, violent crime has gone up. It is of greatest importance that we affirm and acknowledge the government's neglect and decade long under-investment in policing because, if we

cannot acknowledge it and if the government cannot be clear-eyed about the facts, we have very little hope that they will course correct and give police the support that they deserve and that they need and that the community expects them to be given.

I commend my motion to the Assembly.

DR PATERSON (Murrumbidgee—Minister for Police, Fire and Emergency Services, Minister for Women, Minister for the Prevention of Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence, Minister for Corrections and Minister for Gaming Reform) (3.46): I rise today to speak against Ms Morris's motion. Contrary to Ms Morris's continued fearmongering about police and emergency services, for well over a decade the ACT has continued to see year-on-year a decrease in crime. We are really lucky that we live in a safe city, where people's concerns about crime are low, and confidence and trust in our police force is high.

I feel very upset for the family that Ms Morris spoke about in her motion. I hope that Ms Morris has provided them with some information around the Victims of Crime Commissioner and the support that they could be receiving through the Victims of Crime Commissioner. They offer a range of different services to support victims as they progress through the justice system, in terms of financial support, counselling and anything that they need. I would encourage Ms Morris to do that.

The 2024-25 ACT Policing annual report provides insight into public confidence in police, with 72.2 per cent of people reporting having confidence in our police. This figure is 8.4 per cent above the target. Further, 64 per cent of the community are satisfied with policing services, which is 7.2 per cent above the target. A similar figure was reported in the 2025 *Report on government services*, with 73.9 per cent of people in the ACT who recently had contact with police being satisfied with the services.

I think the real litmus test of perceptions of public safety sits with women and the most vulnerable people in our community. Last year the YWCA released the fourth iteration of their *Our lives: women in the ACT report*. The survey had close to 2,800 responses. This report provided the largest sample that they have had of the Our Lives project to date. A key finding in this report was that the proportion of women who felt safe in public had decreased slightly from 81 per cent in 2023 to 79 per cent in 2025. We want women to feel safe all the time, so we know that there is work to do, but what this does suggest is there is a high level of perceptions of safety.

Ms Morris's motion speaks to data from the Roy Morgan perceptions of crime survey. Roy Morgan is a private company that conducts survey research. They do not answer to anyone in terms of their survey methodology or peer review as academic research does, and the results lack transparency in this particular survey, as there is absolutely no indication of sample sizes. What Ms Morris's motion also fails to address is that, even while using this perception of crime survey—and while the ACT has had a 17 percentage point increase in concerns about crime—in Roy Morgan's own words, we were the safest jurisdiction by far, with the least concern about crime in the country.

Yesterday, as Ms Morris said, the Australian Bureau of Statistics released its annual *Recorded Crime—Offenders* publication. The annual publication presented a jurisdictional view of offenders proceeded against by police during the reference period

1 July last year to 30 June 2025. The data in this publication relates to offenders of selected offences and is prepared annually using counting rules developed by the ABS in conjunction with all policing jurisdictions.

This report demonstrates that the ACT had the lowest number of offenders, as well as the lowest rate of offending compared to all other jurisdictions. While there was a small increase in offences proceeded against in the reporting period, the report indicated the long-term trend shows a decrease in the offender rate. In 2008-09 the rate of offending was 1,131.8 per 100,000 people. In 2024-25 the rate fell to 622.1 per 100,000 people—a decrease of approximately 45 per cent over 15 years. The ACT also recorded the lowest proportion of repeat offenders, with 20.8 per cent of offenders proceeded against on two or more occasions in the reporting period.

The ABS report also reflects the work the government has done over the last 15 years in relation to youth crime. In 2008-09, the reported rate of youth crime in the territory was 2,764 offenders per 100,000 people. By 2024-25, this had decreased significantly to 712.7 offenders per 100,000 people—a decrease of nearly 75 per cent. Since the reporting period ended on June 30 last year, the ACT government has fully implemented the changes to raising the age of criminal responsibility. Next year's ABS data will be interesting, because it will be the first data point for the ABS since the age was raised to 14. I will continue to work closely with Minister Pettersson to focus on diversion and therapeutic support for young people who come into contact with police and our justice system.

It is also important to note, reflected in the ABS data, that the number of offenders proceeded against that identified as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander has increased by 13.5 per cent in the reporting period. The ACT government is committed to reducing the rates of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who interact with the criminal justice system, so it is disappointing to see this increase. In 2024 the government commissioned the Jumbunna Institute to review the overrepresentation of First Nations people in the ACT justice system. The review culminated in a final report containing 99 recommendations for reducing overrepresentation across a vast range of government areas.

The final report was publicly released on 30 July last year, with the government tabling an interim response in the Legislative Assembly in September, outlining a staged, whole-of-government approach to implementing the review's highest priority recommendations. The ACT government has set a target to reduce by 2031 the rate of incarceration of First Nations adults to achieve parity with the incarceration rate of non-Indigenous people, as part of addressing outcome 10 of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap. The national target for this outcome is that by 2031, the rate of incarcerated First Nations adults will be reduced by at least 15 per cent. As I heard on the news this morning, across the country we are struggling to meet these targets, demonstrating very clearly that we have significant work to do in this space.

The ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elected Body and the broader First Nations community have informed the development and delivery of the First Nations Cultural Literacy Training Program that is tailored and relevant to the region for ACT Policing members. This program fulfils a recommendation of the ACT Ombudsman's own motion investigation concerning ACT Policing's administrative framework for

engagement with the First Nations community.

As Ms Morris said, the ABS data also showed an increase in the rates of family and domestic violence. As the Minister for the Prevention Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence, I find it deeply concerning. On 28 June 2024, the creation of a new domestic and family violence investigation unit was announced. This was an expansion and restructure of ACT Policing's existing family violence unit, which was primarily focused on coordination. In December 2025, 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 team leads ACT Policing's domestic and family violence training, policy and quality assurance, supporting consistent, best-practice responses and building a contemporary understanding of domestic and family violence trends in the ACT. This structural change recognises the specialist investigative role of this unit and the intersection between domestic and family violence, sexual violence and child abuse.

ACT Policing also has specialist investigators in the Sexual Assault and Child Abuse Team who investigate matters and guide victim-survivors through each step of the process. SACAT's primary focus is providing a victim-centred, trauma-informed police response to sexual violence in our community. In the 2024-25 budget, the ACT government funded a new team in SACAT to respond to increasing rates of sexual violence. I think this all speaks counter to Ms Morris's claim. We are investing in our ACT police and supporting ACT police, and we have a highly professional policing service that prioritises these issues.

This morning in my ministerial statement relating to ACT Policing facilities I gave an overview of the investment into our facilities. I would like to thank Ms Morris for providing me with a second opportunity to speak of the significant investments the government is making. The ACT government allocated \$3.6 million of funding to allow ACT Policing to undertake preventative and reactive maintenance every year for ACT Policing stations. ACT Policing receives over \$300,000 each year as part of the Asset Renewal Program, with funding upgrades or significant improvements to facilities.

In the 2023-24 budget, cabinet agreed to \$3.8 million recurrent funding over two years for a comprehensive feasibility and business case for a new ACT Policing Headquarters and City Police Station, and to assess policing infrastructure needs in Woden and Molonglo. The 2025-26 budget allocated an additional \$1.1 million to fund design work and replace infrastructure at City Police Station and ACT Policing Headquarters. And I also spoke this morning about the process that has been undertaken to progress this work, with the request for expressions of interest and market-sounding that has occurred that will inform a business case going forward for these new facilities. In the 2025-26 budget, cabinet agreed to \$2.5 million in capital funding over two years for a Molonglo town centre delivery strategy.

In the 2024 election, ACT Labor also committed to recruiting an additional 150 police officers to the territory. I am proud to be delivering on this commitment, with 89 recruits completing their training in 2024-25. Since 1 July 2025, we have had an additional 49 recruits graduate. This completely contradicts Ms Morris's delusion. We have a growing police force in the ACT. In the 2024-25 budget, we made the single largest

investment in police by committing \$112.9 million to improve their pay and conditions, in line with the negotiated enterprise bargaining agreement.

I want to speak to point 3 of Ms Morris's motion and why I will not be supporting this motion today: I strongly reject the note and strongly reject Ms Morris's characterisation of policing and crime in the ACT. In doing that, I would like to acknowledge the victims of crime and those who have been harmed by crime that does occur in our community. I work very regularly with victim-survivors and victims of crime and have done so in my years in the Assembly. I see this as a really important part of the work I do, and I will continue to advocate for victims. I also hold the corrections portfolio, which provides an opportunity to be able to invest in and promote the opportunities for education programs and rehabilitation for those people in our community that do cause harm.

What I will affirm in relation to Ms Morris's motion is that we have a growing, professional, diverse police force that goes above and beyond to serve our community every day. I affirm that the ACT government has made year-on-year significant growth in investments in ACT Policing. What I do want to recognise is that while crime rates are decreasing, as Ms Morris pointed out, some crimes, and crimes of violence, have become increasingly complex. I look forward to continuing to work with the Chief Police Officer and ACT police to deliver on our ambitious agenda to keep our community safe. Thank you.

MR EMERSON (Kurrajong) (3.59): I thank Ms Morris for bringing this motion to the Assembly today and acknowledge the important and often very intensive work that ACT Policing do to keep our community safe. Overtime in the police force is often a rule, not an exception. Last year, through a question on notice during annual reports hearings, I learned that an average of 5.44 per cent of ACT police officers on duty at any given time were working overtime hours.

Anecdotally, I have been told that officers, trained and invested in extensively here in the ACT, are often being lost to other jurisdictions where better pay and conditions might be available. Of course, this is a constant source of frustration for the force. Additionally, like many members in this place, I have heard from local officers regarding the adequacy or inadequacy of their working environment. We have seen accounts of sewage running down walls in the City Police Station, significant water leaks when it rains, and urine and faeces contaminating the station. This has been widely reported, and it is completely unacceptable as a work environment for anyone, let alone our dedicated frontline responders.

I appreciate Ms Morris's ongoing work in highlighting these issues and drawing the Assembly's attention to some of the failures that mean our officers are often working gruelling hours in subpar conditions. That is both unacceptable for officers and does not support the retention of qualified staff in the ACT, which, of course, has broad implications for community safety.

Having said that, there are other elements of this motion that I also feel the need to comment on. The statistics quoted in the motion are nuanced and must be considered critically and in context. They do not consider, for instance, whether it is the number of offences that have increased or the reporting and prosecution of offences that have

increased. We know this is particularly relevant in the case of sexual offences, which historically have been significantly under-reported and, of course, continue to be.

While this does remain an issue—I have heard from crisis support workers that more than more than 90 per cent of offences do not get reported, which is seriously alarming—increased community awareness and education about sexual offending and improved support for victims of sexual offences can reasonably be assumed to have played a role in the increased reporting of those offences. While the offences themselves are absolutely abhorrent, the fact that victims feel more supported and encouraged to report these crimes against them is a good thing, and it is worth acknowledging. Of course, it is very possible that the frequency of sexual offending has, indeed, also increased, and that is something we do need to continue grappling with in this place and in our community.

I absolutely acknowledge that there are many members of our community who do not feel safe, whether it be in their own homes or out in public spaces. But stoking fear with respect to the safety of our city does not help them. It does not help anyone. It certainly does not improve community safety and, obviously, it has the potential to reduce perceptions of safety, which is partly the subject of this motion.

The minister shared some helpful statistics online yesterday, the latest ABS data, which shows that the ACT recorded both the lowest number of offenders and the lowest offender rates of all states and territories in 2024-25. The ACT continues to have a long-term decline in offender rates, decreasing from 1,131.8 offenders per 100,000 people in 2008-09 to 622.1 per 100,000 people in 2024-25. I note she has provided further evidence along similar lines in the debate today.

Given that, I do not feel confident in concluding, based on the evidence before us, that the “neglect and underinvestment in ACT Policing have made Canberrans less safe”. While we have the fewest police per capita in the country, we also have Australia’s most police per violent crime committed. That is a clear sign that Canberra remains a very safe place relative to all other jurisdictions.

I want to acknowledge Canberrans who have been the victim of awful crimes in our city. It is critical that, to further enhance the safety of our community and prevent the victimisation of more Canberrans, there is sufficient and evidence-based investment in our police force, and high-quality wraparound supports for victims as well. This goes along with effective intervention programs, which I have often spoken to in this chamber, for those at risk of offending or reoffending.

We are privileged to live in a beautiful and, ultimately, very safe city. While that may be cold comfort for the victims of crime in our community—and reasonably so—it is what the evidence shows. So I will not be supporting Ms Morris’s motion seeking to affirm that “neglect and underinvestment in ACT Policing have made Canberrans less safe”. However, I thank her for raising these issues in the Assembly today and on other occasions, particularly in relation to the working conditions experienced by ACT Policing members. I do strongly support these matters being responded to appropriately by the government, and I hope to see, as the minister signalled in her remarks, more work being done in this area moving forward.

MR RATTENBURY (Kurrajong) (4.05): The Greens will not be supporting this motion today. While there are important discussions to be had about crime prevention and police resources, we consider that this motion, in the way that it is currently drafted, does not address key issues that we believe should be canvassed in a discussion about community safety.

The motion is premised on the idea that greater investment in policing is the primary means of reducing crime rates, which we do not agree with in broad terms; rather, the Greens believe that, if your objective is community wellbeing and the genuine prevention of crime, government resources are best invested in addressing the social determinants of crime.

The best way to prevent someone from being tempted to commit crimes such as burglary and assault is to ensure they have a roof over their head and meals on their table, and that people are socially engaged and feel part of their community. As humans, having our basic needs met improves our mental health, brings us closer to our communities, elevates social cohesion, and reduces crime from the very root causes. It is particularly effective when considering how to reintegrate former offenders back into society and reduce recidivism.

This approach, which in various guises is known as justice reinvestment, was a focus of my work while I was both the justice minister and then the Attorney-General. It is designed to give police far less work to do, allowing their efforts to be efficiently and well directed towards what crime still remains. The ACT has taken important steps on this front over the last decade, with investment in a range of programs that have been independently evaluated and shown to make a material difference in reducing recidivism and promoting community safety.

In the context of this motion, it is also worth reflecting that crime data has a history of being misused and misrepresented. In particular, with a small jurisdiction like the ACT, statistics on violent crimes such as assault can be volatile, such that a simple comparison of two years of data can mask longer trends and the associated stories.

Ms Morris made a comparison between the rates of recorded assault in 2014 and 2024. 2014 was, in fact, a low point for recorded assaults. If we had examined the levels between 2010 and 2020, the surface-level conclusion would have been that recorded crime levels were steady. That point notwithstanding, I also want to emphasise that this is recorded crime, and that it is levels.

Unrecorded and unreported crime is important to account for when assessing trends. Even more importantly, we should be looking at victimisation rates per capita, so as to account for population growth. For this very reason, the Australian Bureau of Statistics conducts surveys on victimisation and publishes them in their own right. These statistics are also presented with two-year pooling of data, so as to help smooth out some of the inter-annual volatility.

The ABS reports that, in the pooled period of 2012 to 2014, the ACT had approximately 7,000 victims of physical assault each year, representing 2.6 per cent of the population, of which approximately 3,300 people reported their most recent incident to police. By comparison, in the pooled period of 2022 to 2024, the ACT had approximately 4,300

victims of physical assault each year, representing 1.2 per cent of the population, of which approximately 700 people reported their most recent incident to police.

The time series as a whole further shows that assault rates in the ACT have been falling over time, while reporting rates have increased, but with a sharp drop in reporting rates in the last few years. The ABS has highlighted a higher level of uncertainty in the last few years of the time series and urged caution in interpretation. That caution is certainly warranted given the greater level of recorded crime. This is an area that definitely warrants closer examination.

Elevated reporting rates map well against the societal events of the last decade, which includes the bravery of the Me Too movement and the efforts of people like former Australian of the Year Rosie Batty. Do we need new life breathed into the learnings from those experiences? It is a question worth asking. I am hopeful that we may get new insights from the ABS when they release an update to this publication, which I believe is due very soon.

With some disappointment, I must, sadly, acknowledge that, on sexual assault, we do indeed have a growing problem. Both reported crime and victimisation statistics tell a similar story: the rates of sexual assault have been increasing over time. This is an uncomfortable fact that we need to continue to grapple with.

Without trying to diminish the complexity of that issue, I think it is worth reflecting on some of the reasons this might be occurring. It has been well reported that social media sites are increasingly platforming misogynist and racist influencers, with algorithms drawing young men towards portrayals of glorified forms of toxic masculinity. The far right is on the rise, promoting the tenets of authoritarianism and sowing distrust in democratic institutions. The ACT is not immune to these phenomena, which concerningly correlate with domestic, family and sexual violence.

Elevated funding of police will not solve these problems and may, in fact, exacerbate them. As the success of the PACER model towards responding to mental health callouts has demonstrated, a blue uniform, on occasion and in particular circumstances, can be a lightning rod for anger, violence or other escalation, which is why it can be critical to send in a mental health worker or a paramedic, depending on the circumstances.

There is plenty that governments at multiple levels can do to improve things. It includes revitalising education campaigns on domestic violence, which has close associations with sexual violence and sexual assaults. We can fund community organisations which provide shelter to those escaping abusive relationships and, most importantly, we should be taking actions which materially improve people's lives.

As I mentioned earlier, the most important thing you can do to prevent crime is to target its social determinants. Poverty and discrimination lead to depression and desperation. The cost-of-living crisis is real, and it manifests in myriad cruel ways. Hatred and cruelty can only be truly defeated at a systemic level by fostering kindness and care.

One of the worst metrics for how much a government is doing to address crime is its expenditure on police. I, for one, am proud that we are not like the Northern Territory in this regard. I am proud of our record in advocating for justice reinvestment in

government. We believe this is the way to generate genuine, long-term community safety, lower victimisation rates, and lower demand for the services that victims of crime subsequently need—basically, a better city for our citizens to live in.

On that basis, the Greens will not be supporting this motion today.

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) (4.12): I, too, rise to join the chorus of responses to Ms Morris’s motion today which showed the selective choosing of statistics and even lines of reporting.

Mr Parton: That is what “selective” means.

MS CHEYNE: “Selective” or “selection”. Yes, thanks Mr Parton; I appreciate it.

Mr Parton: No worries. I am here for you.

MS CHEYNE: The selection of statistics, the selective use of statistics, to try to paint a narrative that has no basis in fact, and to then get to a point of affirming it in such strong language that the actual statistics do not warrant. It was a pretty lazy effort, to be honest. This is what I have been able to find in the last hour or so.

Indeed, in the same line that Ms Morris quoted from, from the Roy Morgan research, it actually begins by saying—and I think Minister Paterson highlighted this—“The ACT have clearly the lowest concern about crime among Australia’s jurisdictions.” Yes, while there has been a spike, this spike has followed the U-shape that all other states and territories have experienced.

We have heard about the offending rate, but I can add that the victimisation rate for assault in the ACT is 519 per 100,000 persons, and that is the lowest in the country. The next highest is Tasmania, at 768 per 100,000 people. Between the 2020-22 data series and the 2022-24 data series, the police reporting rate declined for attempted break-ins from 59 per cent to 39 per cent. In 2024, the number of victims of unlawful entry with intent decreased by 21 per cent from the previous year, and this was the lowest number in the 32-year time series.

With changes in household crime victimisation rates from 2012-14 to the 2022-24 dataset, the victimisation rate again declined for malicious property damage, from 8.2 per cent to 4.4 per cent. The victimisation rate also declined in the same period for physical and/or threatened assault, from 5.2 per cent to 3.3 per cent, and physical assault from 2.6 per cent to 1.2 per cent.

With the victimisation rate for sexual assault, I do recognise that it has increased; this is the highest rate recorded and the numbers are the highest recorded. As I think we have heard in several of the contributions in this place, there are myriad reasons behind this. Indeed, The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare cautions, on its page titled “Sexual Assault Reported to Police” that changes in crime rates may be due to changes in reporting behaviour, increased awareness about forms of violence, changes to police practices and/or an increase in sexual assault incidents.

Noting the contributions of Mr Emerson and Mr Rattenbury, I think that we have covered all of those. I suspect that it is a combination of all of those in the ACT. In particular, police practices have also followed changes to government policy and priority. We have not shied away in the last decade from the scourge of domestic and family violence. Our investment is significant and it continues. In partnership with the police, there have been some major changes to how they conduct their operations, including with the dedicated Domestic and Family Violence Investigation Unit.

I would also point out that there is a very tight band in which the full-time equivalent operational sworn staff per 100,000 people is fluctuating between. Indeed, this is something on which I at least agree with in Ms Morris's motion—that, in 2015-16, there were 173 operational sworn staff per 100,000 and, in 2024-25, there were 169. But that is four staff per 100,000 people, and that is a very modest fluctuation. When we have such small numbers, I think it is a pretty big call to make that it is sustained underinvestment or purposely trying to drop the rate. When it is that small, there is absolutely room for changes of operations, and staff coming and going at any one point in time. I do not think that is a relevant statistic to be drawing from, as much as it is accurate.

What does matter, I would point out, is capability and outcomes. ACT Policing are highly capable and extremely professional. They have been responding to government priorities and community expectations about where they should be investing their time. I think we have all seen some incredibly important outcomes and incredibly distressing ones as a result of the dedicated Domestic and Family Violence Investigation Unit. I would also note that they have had a concentration on high visibility operations, like Operation TORIC. That has coincided with reductions in several property crime types. Meanwhile, P1 emergency response times have improved, so the numbers of officers do not tell the whole story. The capability of ACT Policing and the outcomes it is able to produce for our community do. That firmly reconnects us right back to the fact that Canberrans do feel safe. It is the safest place in the country, and Canberrans feel the safest in the country.

It feels like the motion took little effort, when there is so much immediately available, publicly available data that refutes most of the claims made, which were trying to convince the Assembly to affirm a statement that, ultimately, has no basis. It was a disappointing effort; hopefully, we can continue to celebrate the wins of ACT Policing and their extraordinary efforts.

I want to conclude by acknowledging the victims of crime and the impact that that has. I appreciate the specific example that Ms Morris was referencing, if I heard it correctly, which was an indication that the speed at which the assistance through Victim Support ACT came to those victims was perhaps slower than we would have liked.

Minister Paterson and I have met with the new Victims of Crime Commissioner. Ensuring that there is timely assistance for people who have been subject to crime and are victims of crime is a priority for her, and it is certainly a priority for us. But it does not take away, in any way, from the experience of that household. I feel exactly the same way as Minister Paterson. I am devastated for that household and very much hope that things are looking up for them in the time ahead.

I commend the chamber for what seems like its strong opposition to this motion.

MR CAIN (Ginninderra) (4.21): I want to touch on a few points that I heard and points that concern me that I have heard—firstly, from the leader of the Greens, discounting increased expenditure on police as something that will improve the monitoring and prevention of crime. That is a really startling thing to hear. Of course, we want to spend money to prevent the growth of crime, whether it is in the education system, family support, justice reinvestment—of course, we want to support all those things—but how could you discount having an increased police force as part of the solution to a reduction of crime? Just go and talk to people out in the suburbs—in particular, in West Belconnen, where I am doorknocking at the moment. They are really bothered. They are really worried about what is really preventable crime situations that face some of them fairly frequently.

As members would know, I have sponsored two petitions calling for an increased presence in Belconnen, and unfortunately I am not sure we have seen much change. Again, as members would know, petitions are brought to a member for their sponsorship. It is not the member petitioning the community or the government; it is the community saying to the government, “We think there is a problem; can the members present that to this Assembly?” I have done that on two occasions, for Kippax shopping centre and also for the suburb group of Hawker, Page and Scullin—and I will be meeting with one of the Neighbourhood Watch groups tonight.

Unfortunately, crime in Belconnen is a real issue for them—preventable behaviour; people who are worried about their property and who are worried about their persons. In fact, just on the weekend, I heard a firsthand report from a resident who was in the local Woolworths at Hawker, who witnessed two individuals going in with backpacks, masked up and emptied the shelves. They confronted the staff, who, unfortunately, now wear chest cameras because of the problems that are occurring out in that Woolworths store in Hawker, and these blatant thieves knew they could not do anything about it. A police presence in the area would discourage such behaviour. That is what this motion is calling for. I endorse the motion, and I thank Ms Morris for bringing this to us. I think it is an area that the government has underinvested in for far too long.

MS BARRY (Ginninderra) (4.24): I, too, rise to speak in support of this motion, and I thank Ms Morris for bringing this motion to the attention of the Assembly. I thank other members for their contribution. I intentionally wanted to speak last because I wanted to hear what some of the arguments were. It was quite interesting to hear that, while it is important that data drives what we do in this place, it is also really important to take into consideration the concerns raised by citizens. As Mr Cain alluded to, I am often inundated with concerns when I am out in the Belconnen area, Kippax, Charnwood, Jamison and Cook, about the level of crime and preventable crime. This is not just the perception; it is actually happening.

As reflected in the motion—although it is debated about what statistics were selected—offences against the person have increased by 29 per cent; as indicated, sexual offence by 42 per cent; and the number of assault victims has risen from 1,728 in 2014 to 2,482 in 2024. I do hear Mr Rattenbury’s comments around the 2014 data compared to previous data and if that comparison was made then perhaps it would have been a

decrease. But the reality is, moving forward, crimes and assaults have increased. It is not retrospective data; it is data that we should take into account today.

These are not marginal shifts and this data does not tell the full story. As I have indicated, what I am hearing particularly in the Belconnen area is a growing reluctance to report crime at all, with people asking me the question: “What is the point of reporting if nothing is going to change?” When people disengage from reporting, the issue is no longer just about crime; it is also about a breakdown of trust. I understand we are talking here about the policing presence, but I think it is important to highlight the broader issues that we face when we have a system that discourages people from reporting crime.

It is also important to note that these statistics do not capture the full picture. They do not fully capture harmful behaviour involving children below the age of criminal responsibility; yet communities still experience the impact of that behaviour. I am constantly approached by residents asking me to do something about what they are seeing—young people caught on CCTV breaking into cars, shoplifting and engaging in antisocial behaviours. Parents are worried not just about the community but also about their own children, who are going to work and being exposed to the behaviour as part of their everyday lives. One parent told me that her daughter had been encouraged to shoplift as an after-school activity because it was fun and, in her words, “the police will not do anything”. Where does that fall into the data capture?

I tossed around whether to raise this or not—but what is the point of being in this place if I cannot add to this debate on a personal level? A few months ago, my daughter was assaulted on the way back from work. Her hair was pulled and her dress torn, just because she said to a boy, “You are annoying me.” When we went to the police station, we were told that nothing could be done, because the child was under the age of criminal responsibility. I asked whether they could at least respond, whether the police could at least attend, caution him and refer him to therapeutic supports, and the answer was no. I anticipate that that is because what is the point really? There was really no impact in doing all of those things, because the child is below the age of criminal responsibility. They are probably conserving resources to deal with urgent, immediate issues.

The same young person has since gone on to engage in repeated antisocial behaviour. While the behaviour continues, the impact on my daughter will stay with her for the rest of her life. My once bubbly daughter now spends days in her room. She would never catch the bus again; she would never be able to walk into a bus station; and she would never, ever be able to go to that area of Belconnen again. I did not want this child to go to jail. That is not the point. The point is that he walked away from the incident knowing that there was no consequence from what he had done. What message does that send, both to him and to my child? It says to my child that the system will not protect you. It says to our youth that behaviour like this carries no consequence—and there is nothing to prevent it from happening again. The question I asked people of this chamber and this Assembly is: where does my daughter fall in the statistics? Where does that behaviour get captured in the statistics?

We are far too focused on virtue signalling rather than enforcing practical and visible responses to reassure the community. Any intervention is key and I agree: we need to work with these minors while they are in their formative years to avoid raising career

criminals. It is our duty to protect children, to raise them to become good, law-abiding citizens. It is the only way to nurture a cohesive society. Without any effective legal process that requires young offenders to realise the severity of their actions and to make them participate in mandatory therapy, we are letting these children down and we are failing them.

That young boy received a slap on the wrist and he was back on the streets. To date, no-one from the police force has called me to inquire as to how my daughter is going. I have not been told whether the matter is still under investigation. I have not been told whether the matter has been closed. I do not blame the police force for this. The young constable who was attending to my daughter was very sympathetic, but she said to me, “It is what it is. The child is under the age of criminal responsibility. There is nothing we can do.”

We are letting people down. We are letting people in the suburbs down. We are letting people in our community down. I have had parents reach out to me complaining of similar incidents. A parent I once worked with met me at the Charnwood shopping centre and said, “My daughter was assaulted by a young person at the mall and nothing was done.” I asked her, “Did you go to the police?” And she shrugged: “What is the point? They will not do anything anyway.” That is the society we are building, and that is the society that we are accepting to live in. I really encourage people in this chamber to take this issue seriously. We are seeing a trend emerging here. Yes, policing resources is not all of the solution, but it is part of the solution. I have said many times in this chamber: “When my daughter was harassed or when I experienced domestic and family violence, who should I have called—mental health support? What was the immediate action that I should have taken to prevent continuous assault on myself or my child?”

Policing resources is important to us addressing crime in this state. It is important. It cannot be underestimated and it is part of the solution. Underfunding police does not keep anybody safe. While I hear the arguments from the Greens, I also think it is important to recognise that these crimes are occurring under our noses and there is an issue brewing. It is not a fear campaign and it is not fear tactics; it is happening in our community and we must do something about it. I commend Ms Morris for her motion and I commend the motion to the Assembly.

MR PARTON (Brindabella—Leader of the Opposition) (4.34): I just wanted to stand and briefly say that there are a number of people in the grassroots of my party who said to me after our discussions with your party over the summer, Mr Deputy Speaker, “How could you possibly deal with them; they are Greens and they have some crazy ideas?” When we have a debate like this, I kind of see where they are coming from. I would refer members to a Greens member of this parliament last term who very specifically said, “If you have more police, you have more crime.” So, if you have more police and you have more crime, it means that, if you have less police you have less crime—obviously he did not say that second part—which is blatantly ridiculous.

I do post a fair few videos on social media. The video of mine that has had the most views in the last 12 months is me standing here at an adjournment debate reading an email from Renee, who is a mother and whose son was involved in a couple of incidents at a large retail store where hooded hoodlums came in and ran amok and stole things,

and in the second incident they actually punched Renee's son, and Renee was not able to get sufficient—or really anything—from the police. I think it goes to the point that has been made by a few people during this debate: that you can all say, "Let's have a look at the crime statistics, because they are on the way down," but we all know that many members of the community have reached this point where they have said to themselves, "There is no point in reporting this."

On that post regarding Renee and her son's experience, Julian says—this is probably not helpful: "Pop a few posters of Trump and Musk in your window and they will be around before you know it." Anthony said:

As a person with a disability, I will not go out into public spaces from late afternoon and doubly so now and it is not fear that I have, it is knowledge. Best wishes to Renee and her family.

Mark said:

I called the police when I saw an intruder in our backyard and they replied, "What would you like us to do about it?"

So Mark said to me, "What is the point of calling?" So we are past the point where we can rely on crime statistics. Cos says:

If you report a crime knowing full well the police will not attend, the primary effect is that my insurance premiums go up in the area I live in.

Crystal says:

Same thing happens at the store that my daughter works at, not just youths but all ages. It is in Tuggeranong. I was waiting for her one afternoon to finish and the people leaving the store near closing, three separate lots of them, and they had been in there stealing in that span of 20 to 30 minutes, all caught by staff or on surveillance. Nothing that staff can do and no point in calling the police, they do not come. We all pay for that at the checkout because I guarantee the corporations are not taking the losses.

Ms Morris has raised an issue which is extremely important to most Canberrans, and I am most disappointed that this motion is not going to pass today. I certainly offer it my full support.

MS MORRIS (Brindabella) (4.38), in reply: I have to say that it was pretty hard to take anything that the police minister said at face value after her opening remarks, because her opening remarks gave the strongest indication yet that this government do not get it. They do not get it or they do not care. They refuse to acknowledge the facts which their own ACT Policing annual reports lay out and that the ABS data lays out and yesterday's data released by the ABS showing that the number of offenders has increased from 2,222 to 2,658, and that includes those offenders who intended to cause injury rising from 662 to 971. They call those facts delusional. They refuse to acknowledge that crimes against the person have gone up while over the same period support for our police has gone backwards. Instead, the police minister's response is that conversations of this nature on the increase of violent crime and government under-

resourcing of police is fearmongering and delusional.

The police minister is the minister who is responsible for keeping Canberrans and this city safe. It is not the job of the police minister to insult every victim of crime in this city by dismissing conversations of their experiences as fearmongering and delusional. I would remind the minister that there are many people who are watching this debate—victims; people who have been harmed; their loved ones who have been harmed; and their children who have been harmed. I thank you, Ms Barry, for sharing your experiences. I know that that was not an easy thing for you to do. People are watching, and I can actually think of nothing more disrespectful than the police minister, the person responsible for keeping the city safe, using the language that she has used today. It is extraordinary. I want to thank Mr Rattenbury and Mr Emerson for their contributions. While we obviously disagree in some areas, I thank them that at least their contributions were respectful and at least they could acknowledge some very legitimate concerns over safety in the community.

It is obviously a very disappointing outcome in the chamber today. It is obviously not the right outcome. But I want to close by thanking our police officers who do a tremendous job to serve this city—and, my word, do they have their hands tied doing that! Just look at the legislative environment that they have to operate in—and Ms Barry has touched on that today—and then look at the working conditions that they have to operate in every single day—ceilings collapsing, flooding, sewerage, underpaid, short-staffed. But every day they show up, they rock up, because they know what their responsibility is and they know what their duty is, and they know that there are so many people in our community who are relying on them to do their absolute best. I want to honour and commend them for the work that they do.

As the Canberra Liberals leader, Mark Parton, has said, we are here to reclaim Canberra for the people. I think the government is blind to the fact that violent crime is on the rise. But I can tell you that the people are not blind to that fact, because we hear their stories all the time. Mr Cain, Ms Barry and Mr Parton have touched on that. We hear their stories all the time, and I imagine that those opposite probably hear their stories and get those stories in their inbox too, but they have a wildly different approach on how to respond to that. The Canberra Liberals are not blind to these issues. We take them very seriously, because we understand that we have a responsibility to the people to keep them safe and to ensure that they are protected. To do that, you have to adequately resource our police force. But the record of the ACT Labor government is clear: over the past 10 years, that investment in our police force has gone backwards. The Canberra Liberals are here to reclaim Canberra for the people, and that is exactly what we will work to do every single day. I commend my motion to the Assembly.

Question put:

That the motion be agreed to.

The Assembly voted—

Ayes 7

Noes 14

Chiaka Barry
Peter Cain

Yvette Berry
Andrew Braddock

Marisa Paterson
Michael Pettersson

Leanne Castley
 Jeremy Hanson
 James Milligan
 Deborah Morris
 Mark Parton

Fiona Carrick
 Tara Cheyne
 Jo Clay
 Thomas Emerson
 Laura Nuttall
 Suzanne Orr

Shane Rattenbury
 Chris Steel
 Rachel Stephen-Smith
 Caitlin Tough

Question resolved in the negative.

Community sector—funding

MISS NUTTALL (Brindabella) (4.47): I seek leave to amend my motion on the notice paper by omitting the words “ensure it” and substituting “ensure community sector indexation” in paragraph 3(b).

Leave granted.

MISS NUTTALL: I move the amended motion:

That this Assembly:

(1) notes that:

- (a) community sector organisations support social inclusion, provide essential services for people in need and contribute to the wellbeing of the ACT;
- (b) the community sector is under growing pressure from increased demand, alongside rising service complexity and inflation in operating costs;
- (c) the 2025-2026 budget included approximately \$252 million in funding in 2025-2026 for contracts with not-for-profit community sector organisations subject to community sector indexation (CSI);
- (d) in the *State of the ACT Community Sector Report 2025*, the ACT Council of Social Service (ACTCOSS) reported that 83 per cent of organisations reported increased demand in 2024, compared to 67 per cent in 2022;
- (e) the government reviews the ACT CSI before every budget, and in the 2025-2026 budget the CSI formula was “(wage price index (WPI) or SCHADS Award increase \times 0.8) + (consumer price index (CPI) \times 0.2)”;
- (f) ACTCOSS’ 2026-2027 budget submission finds “current ACT government indexation arrangements do not reflect the real and mandatory cost increases that community organisations must absorb”;
- (g) ACTCOSS’ 2026-2027 ACT budget submission suggests the CSI formula should incorporate mandatory superannuation, long service leave and insurance increases; and
- (h) many community facilities are aging, inaccessible, require further maintenance or are not equipped to withstand climate-related hazards;

(2) further notes that:

- (a) in 2023, the government responded to recommendations made in ACTCOSS’ *Counting the Costs* report and agreed in principle to implement longer-term funding contracts where appropriate for non-government organisations; and

- (b) in 2024, ACT Labor made an election commitment to:
 - (i) move towards parity between the public and community sectors for paid parental leave, superannuation and family and domestic violence leave through the community sector multi-employer agreement (MEA); and
 - (ii) continue the expansion of its maintenance and upgrade capabilities and review its facilities to ensure investment in new and upgraded buildings deliver maximum value for community tenants; and
- (3) calls on the government to:
 - (a) prioritise the community sector's fiscal sustainability and ability to meet growing demand by considering an uplift in the current \$10 million funding boost over two years to \$20 million per year over the forward estimates, starting in the 2026-2027 budget;
 - (b) ensure community sector indexation reflects actual cost pressures, including mandatory increases to superannuation, long service leave and insurance, and incorporate adjustments into the 2025-2026 budget baseline to recognise unfunded superannuation and long service leave increases since 2021;
 - (c) make contract funding renewal decisions at least six months before expiry where appropriate and practicable in time for the 2027-2028 budget;
 - (d) seek a reasonable funding uplift subject to the MEA being finalised in the 2026-2027 budget and future government budgets to progress parity between the public and community sectors in superannuation, paid parental leave and family and domestic violence leave entitlements;
 - (e) continue and extend the current pilot sector-wide climate resilience initiatives and use Disaster Ready Fund rounds four and five where possible to upgrade community sector premises to be fit-for-purpose, accessible, well-located and resilient to extreme weather and climate impacts; and
 - (f) report back to the Assembly on progress against these measures by the first sitting day of September 2026.

We would all like to think that when someone in Canberra is struggling to find a home, or escaping from a dangerous situation, or cannot afford groceries for their family, they would receive immediate help. We would like to think that if we ever ended up in a bad situation, we would be able to access the right service quickly, and get the help we needed.

This is the work of the community sector; not-for-profit organisations who provide all kinds of community services. These are the people who will help you if you end up homeless, if you need support for your mental health, if you are struggling to put food on the table for you or your neighbours. They provide everything from prevention through to crisis support for family, domestic and sexual violence. They provide support for people with a disability, and queer peer support.

When we trust these organisations to look after people when they are doing it the toughest, it sounds like the most obvious thing in the world—but we need them to have enough money to do that work without burning out their people, cutting programs, or

turning away people in need. And surely, we do, right? If nothing else, the one thing government should be doing for people is making sure that they have support when they most need it.

Funding those services to meet the needs in front of them, that is basic social and economic justice. I think it is fair enough that most of us assume funding for the community sector just happens as a matter of course, and that it is enough. Most Canberrans I have talked to have a focus on making their own ends meet.

But reality paints a grim picture for the state of our community sector and our ability to help people. At the end of 2025, ACTCOSS released the *State of the ACT Community Sector Report*. Even if they only have a couple of minutes, I would thoroughly encourage members and anyone else listening in to read the excellent executive summary—talking about the importance of the community sector in the ACT, outlining all the essential work that happens, and calling out for a lifeline for the sector. The summary details a deep commitment every worker and organisation has to the Canberra community.

However, the sector is suffering. I am going to quote some stats directly from that report, here. Eighty-three per cent of organisations—four fifths—reported increased demand in 2024, compared to 67 per cent in 2022. And that is ridden by cost-of-living pressures, housing insecurity and a lack of mental health support. Now, increased demand sounds dry. In human terms, four-fifths of our organisations are seeing more and more Canberrans who need serious help. Seventy-six per cent of organisations surveyed—three quarters—reported an increase in clients presenting with complex needs. Now we need to be able to meet complex needs, because people are not less deserving of help because they have more that they need help with.

Seventy-six per cent of respondents, again three quarters, reported staff exhaustion and burnout. Fifty-nine per cent of workers said they felt emotionally drained. Mind you, these are the people we are trusting to work often for far less than they make in the public service, for the good of our most vulnerable.

Many staff are working on eight hours just to keep services afloat. Emotionally draining work coupled with short-term contracts create major funding cliffs and cycles of uncertainty within the workforce. ACTCOSS calls for urgent action and that is why I am bringing this motion today.

Now, this is not a new problem. The sector has been sounding alarm bells for ages. Back in 2021, the *Counting the Costs* report was released. This report echoed much of what I have already mentioned: staffing retention issues, a casualised non-permanent workforce, funding cliffs, and government funding not reflecting the actual costs of delivering community services. The report also thoroughly analysed the areas of need in reform and recommended what to prioritise.

Now, if you are just tuning in, you might wonder how it has gotten this bad. We are facing a reality where community sector funding just has not kept pace with the needs in front of us and a bunch of things have made that worse.

The sector over the years has had to adapt to a multitude of increasing costs, pressures

and demands like the cost of living, the housing crisis, financial stress, mental health pressures. Our population has grown, and that means more people in our city that need help. Employment costs have gone up.

When community organisations identify a systemic problem and want to ask the government to do something about that, they are not always funded for that. And if they do want to contribute, they might be taking someone off the front lines or needing them to work after hours—and not necessarily being able to pay them for that.

In real terms, the funding the government provides to the community sector just has not kept pace. Cumulatively, the sector has experienced years of chronic underfunding, leading to the urgent situation we are in now. I appreciate underfunding is a broad term and the government will rightly say, "Well hang on, we do have a formula to increase our funding each year based on things getting more expensive, that is the community sector indexation, or CSI, formula."

But we can point to very specific things that governments generally do not account for in contracts with community services, but that still cost money. I am thinking of things like increases in mandatory superannuation costs, long service leave and skyrocketing insurance.

Now, if government does not increase their funding in line with these costs while they are happening, the amount community sector organisations can spend helping people drops in real terms. With that in mind, my motion asks the government to include things like super and long service leave and insurance, in that indexation. We need their funding to stretch as far as it has previously, or we will not help as many people.

You might also say, "Well, okay, but money is not infinite and we are in a budget deficit." Objectively, yes, we are. The trouble is, it is easy to see how community organisations miss out on funding that might prevent a whole lot of problems down the track, because the impact of funding them well is really hard to measure.

Here is an example. We all know that intuitively, people are less likely to end up in the ED if they see a GP; and they are less likely to end up homeless if they get rent assistance when they need it. That is hard to measure, right? You are not going to be easily able to count how many ED visits never happened, because people got their lump checked out at their family practice.

Nevertheless, we know that investing in these preventative services does two things: it helps people earlier before things get awful for them; it is kinder; and the process it also saves the government a hell of a lot of money because it takes pressure off the acute services they deliver directly.

You yourself, Mr Speaker, probably will not mind me mentioning that you literally wrote a discussion paper which extolled the virtues of preventative health back in 2010. It is called *The State of Our Health*. I recommend reading it.

Ultimately, what do we do with this information? Actually, we need to commit to funding the community sector more. That is why my motion asks the government to seriously consider providing a \$20 million boost every year over the forward estimates.

It is a credit to the ACT government that they have recognised that this funding deficit exists, and they are halfway through a \$5 million per year funding boost to the sector.

Now, we have not pulled the \$20 million figure out of nowhere. It is the quantum recommended by ACTCOSS in their budget submission. They have been generous and given the government an extra year to start that funding increase, but we think that the community sector is under enough pressure that we should start this funding boost in the upcoming budget.

What about workers? The people who work in crazy long hours; they are burning out. According to ACTCOSS's most recent survey of the sector, 59 per cent of them—almost three every five, in every office—are burning out. We know that pay and conditions are not keeping pace with that of the public service. I can see why that frustrates them.

I imagine many of them know they do brilliant work in the public sector, which is also hard work, and not have to internalise some of the same risks of occupational violence and long hours that come from the frontline work they are currently doing. I think many of them would argue that just because they are doing this for the right reasons, to help our community when they think help is most needed, that they should not get access to the same superannuation, paid parental leave, and family and domestic violence leave as public servants serving their valuable role.

We know that this Labor government recognises that injustice because, as our motion points out, their election commitment back in 2024 was, and I believe I am quoting directly here: “To move towards parity between the public and community sectors for paid parental leave, superannuation and family and domestic violence leave through the community sector multi-employer agreement.”

Now, I am aware that the government's role in deciding pay and conditions through the MEA is limited. It is not absolute. But I hope this Labor government would not have made that commitment if there was nothing they could do about it. So, we are asking them to make the funds available in the ACT budget when the MEA is finalised—hopefully with a good result for community sector employees.

What happens in the meantime? I am also now hearing from the sector that their workers, the people that make this whole thing tick, have started to make use of community sector services themselves. Look, what an indictment on us that the people that we are trusting to support Canberrans in their time of most need are working in a system that is so underfunded that they are now in a position where they have to use these very same services. How is the not-for-profit and community sector expected to support vulnerable Canberrans when they themselves are operating without uncertainty?

Speaking of uncertainty, I can point to, in particular, the Our Place Youth Foyer in Braddon whose contract expiry was only about six weeks away, I believe, when they finally found out that they were getting renewed. Up until that point, the young people living there had no confirmation that they had secure housing at the end of that financial year.

I appreciate that the ministers cannot tell organisations before the decision has been made, but the consequence of that was that young people with lived experience of homelessness were having to make exit plans for an accommodation they did not know if they would still have.

Community sector workers, clients and organisations deserve certainty. That is why I am calling for contract renewal decisions to be made at least six months before the end date. Ensuring that these decisions are finalised six months prior to the end of the contract will provide stability and forward planning to these organisations, their staff and their clients.

The community sector delivers so many crucial services to Canberrans. However, many organisations operate out of facilities that are ageing, unfit for purpose, vulnerable to climate hazards, and inaccessible. Many of the sector's facilities, including ACT government-owned buildings, do not fit the needs of the community.

Poor facilities limit and interrupt the incredible services that the sector can provide. Not to mention, they are aiding the ACT's most vulnerable communities. These groups are the ones who are affected the most by extreme temperatures and weather events. Providing support for organisations to submit to the federal Disaster Ready Fund will offer the community sector robust investment in the facilities they operate from.

So, where does this all leave us? After hearing significant, sustained concerns from the community sector about their funding, I brought this motion on to ensure greater financial sustainability for the sector. I approach this with the hope that this government would consider this funding as urgent and as a priority, to ensure that the sector is recognised and supported for the value-add it has for the Canberra community and for the ACT government.

I would really like to thank Minister Orr and her office for taking the time to talk us through the complexities of indexation and budget processes and the wage price index. I believe we are in for quite a productive debate today. They genuinely have spent a lot of time and energy working with us, and I do not want that to go unnoticed. I want to thank Mr Cain and his office for their consistent and productive engagement on this, and Mr Emerson and Ms Carrick and their teams for being so available and understanding about how this whole thing has unfolded.

I would also really like to thank ACTCOSS who have been very generous with their time and expertise—especially with the time and expertise of the community sector comes at an opportunity cost to all the other really valuable things that they are doing with their day.

We are already seeing significant increasing demand for these services and if we do not act now for the community sector, the not-for-profits will wear the cost.

MR EMERSON (Kurrajong) (5.00): I rise to speak in support of Miss Nuttall's motion today. According to the ACTCOSS 2025 Anti-Poverty Week Snapshot, approximately 10 per cent of Canberrans are living in poverty. Forty-eight thousand people in our community are living below the poverty line. These are the people who ultimately bear and will continue to bear the disproportionate human cost of an insufficiently funded

community sector. These are the people who cannot tolerate the fuel price hikes that we are seeing, who are most heavily impacted by high inflation and rising interest rates, who are struggling to pay rent and are forced to rely on homelessness services, who have to ration their heating in the depths of Canberra winter so their electricity bill does not tip them further into poverty, and who have to choose between feeding themselves and feeding their kids; yet, at a time of increasing need and increasingly complex and difficult work in the community sector, funding remains chronically inadequate.

I welcome the \$10 million community sector funding uplift in the last budget as a sign of goodwill and an acknowledgement of the underfunding of the sector over an extended period of time in the context of population growth and growing complexity of community need, while noting feedback from the sector that, although this funding was welcomed by them as well, it was clearly insufficient to address the challenges that they are facing. According to the ACTCOSS data of the ACT Community Sector Survey 2025, only 16 per cent of community organisations said their funding enabled them to meet the level of demand that they are seeing and only seven per cent said they could employ enough staff to meet demand, which is down from 19 per cent in 2022. It is a big drop. Nineteen per cent was not a high baseline either.

Community sector organisations rely heavily on the ACT government for sufficient funding to carry out critical work—work which, to be clear, the government would be expected to step in and do, in many cases, if the community sector did not or could not do it any longer. According to the survey, one in five community organisations received funding from the ACT government, with 59 per cent saying this was their most important source of funding.

As we are so acutely aware in this Assembly and as these statistics demonstrate, the sector is overstretched, underfunded and burning out. It is very much dependent on the ACT government for funding. This is clear to all of us, which is why, in supply and confidence agreements with the government, the ACT Greens and I both secured key commitments focused on better funding for our community sector. This is reflected in the brief amendment that I have circulated.

I move:

After paragraph (2)(b), insert:

- “(c) in supply-and-confidence agreements with Mr Emerson and the ACT Greens, ACT Labor committed to reviewing funding for the community sector prior to the 2025-26 Budget, and progressing outcomes through future budgets to account for growth in salaries, population and complexity of client need; and”.

MR EMERSON: Having met with ACTCOSS and discussed with them their budget submission, I strongly support Miss Nuttall’s motion and thank her for bringing it to the Assembly today. I think there has been an extended back-and-forth exchange between Miss Nuttall and the minister. I have some sympathy for the government’s wariness to support a private member’s motion calling for a specific appropriation in a specific budget. As much as I would love to bring many such motions of my own, I am glad, though, that this motion has picked up on commitments, particularly regarding pay and conditions for community sector staff.

I note that one of the government's key election commitments was to move towards parity between the public and community sectors for paid parental leave, superannuation, and family and domestic violence leave. We are yet to see much progress in this area, though, so I look forward to the delivery of this election commitment sooner rather than later, I hope, because at the moment it is unclear as to whether that commitment is being progressed.

In response to a question I asked in the most recent annual reports hearings about why the government had rejected a proposal for paid parental leave parity in the community sector, the minister indicated they are still in negotiation—the government are still in negotiation for parity between public and community sectors for paid parental leave. They do not really give any specific reason for rejecting the claim. The response stated that they have been in negotiations for many years regarding other claims, including increased paid family and domestic violence leave. It is not enough to continue these negotiations. A satisfactory outcome must be come to so that Canberrans working in the community sector are supported appropriately to actually do their jobs, lest those with big hearts and a firm commitment to equity and social justice that are working in the sector leave the sector, particularly given the competitive pressure from both the public and the private sectors for good staff in this city.

On the back of the Food Relief Action Plan and the critical response that has precipitated across the Assembly, I am concerned that there is a lack of urgency and priority being given to the Canberrans who most need our attention, which one would imagine being a core value and priority for any progressive government. Given that, and given this motion today, we need to see the government follow through on its commitments by providing a serious investment in the community sector in its upcoming budget. Clear commitments have been made, clear election commitments have been made, and other commitments have been made in written agreements that are the basis upon which Labor has been given the privilege to govern our territory. It is a privilege granted to them by this Assembly, not an unconditional guarantee.

On that basis, I expect to see a significant turnaround in the upcoming budget when it comes to community sector funding. I imagine Miss Nuttall and the sector have similar expectations. Again, I thank Miss Nuttall for bringing this motion to the Assembly today. I commend both her motion and my amendment to the chamber.

MISS NUTTALL (Brindabella) (5.06): I would really like to thank Mr Emerson for these friendly amendments. He is doing us a bit of a solid here. When he first suggested his amendment, I realised that, with all the information we wanted to include in the motion, we hit the 500-word mark without actually mentioning our supply and confidence agreement with Labor and the commitments we secured with that, or, indeed, Mr Emerson's agreement, for that matter. For the record, the commitments in ours were: reviewing funding for the community sector prior to the 2025-26 budget; progressing outcomes through future budgets to account for the growth in salaries, population and complexity of client need; and working with the community sector towards bringing community sector employee pay and conditions, including superannuation and leave arrangements, more in line with similar work in the public service. This is a good, factual amendment. I am really glad to have another ally in the fight to fund the community sector fairly.

MS CARRICK (Murrumbidgee) (5.07): I rise to support this important motion brought forward by Miss Nuttall and to acknowledge the essential role our community sector plays in supporting social inclusion and the wellbeing of Canberrans. The evidence before us is clear. Demand for community services continues to rise, complexity is increasing and costs are escalating, yet funding arrangements have not kept pace. Many organisations are being asked to absorb mandatory cost increases that are simply not reflected in current indexation settings. The community sector indexation formula is a key example. While it includes wages and CPI, it excludes unavoidable costs such as superannuation, long service leave and insurance. These are not discretionary expenses; they are legal obligations. When funding fails to recognise them, the shortfall does not disappear; it is pushed onto organisations, stretching staff and ultimately the people who rely on these services.

The condition of community facilities also matters. Many organisations operate from ageing, inaccessible buildings that are increasingly vulnerable to extreme weather. In Woden, the Callam Offices precinct presents a clear practical opportunity to invest in a well-located community services hub close to public transport and existing services. Failing to invest in precincts like this reflects a broader pattern of deferring infrastructure decisions that the sector can no longer afford.

I also strongly support the call for greater funding certainty. Short-term contracts and late renewal decisions undermine workforce stability, planning and service continuity. Six to twelve months notice of funding decisions is not an unreasonable request; it is a basic requirement for responsible service delivery. Too often, the response to these concerns is that they will be considered through the budget process, but, when the same issues are raised year after year—indexation gaps, unfunded cost pressures—and the outcome remains incremental or temporary, that response becomes inadequate. A process that consistently defers structural problems is not neutral; it entrenches them.

The amendment requires Labor to respond to budget submissions from the community sector, so, like other members in this chamber, I expect that the budget will provide a more sustainable footing for the community sector. Given that it takes so long, I would support Miss Nuttall's motion for the funding that she asks for.

MR CAIN (Ginninderra) (5.10): My expectation is that, through a series of amendments that are yet to be spoken to, I could speak on many occasions this afternoon, but I will try to be comprehensive in anticipation that we progress as we seem to have agreed. I thank Miss Nuttall for bringing forward this really important motion and also for negotiating through the day—actually, longer than that. I also thank Minister Orr for entering into what I believe are good-faith negotiations. I think we are going to end up with something that this Assembly will support in its wholeness.

At the heart of this motion—and I do not think any member in this place would disagree with this statement—is an appreciation of the value of our community sector, particularly the volunteering component of our community sector. But the call for action in this motion is for government funding to encourage and support that sector. As difficult as it might be, the government clearly has an approach to coming up with a number. With whatever formula they use within the bowels of Treasury, they come up with a number that they think is appropriate to support the community sector. That would be a fascinating thing to look at and be involved in. I encourage the minister and

the Treasurer to deliver to the Assembly—perhaps estimates will be a prime opportunity—how they come up with a number that they think is right for the sector. As with many areas of governance, it could always be more. We know that.

One thing I am really keen to see is how the government approaches the savings that the community sector provides to government, because I believe that saving is quite enormous but not easy to quantify. There are the volunteers—unpaid people who contribute their time and effort. Imagine the contributions they make to the health of our community in mental health support, advocacy for rehabilitation and getting people out of addictions. And there are our land care groups—my goodness, the savings they make to our municipal services. Our community sector actually saves the government money, so, in a way, supporting the sector is supporting savings. Someone may be prevented from furthering a terrible life of addiction. In five or 10 years, the cost to the health system—and there may even be a cost to the judicial system as some of these journeys go—is a pretty enormous cost.

I encourage the government to be really honest in its assessment of the contribution of our community sector, particularly the volunteers, whose unpaid work saves taxpayers' money and saves the government expending on things, by preventing problems that, if they did appear, would be much more expensive to deal with—let alone the human damage that goes with that. Getting in early—I guess that is my point—is such a wonderful thing for the government to think about. What the motion is calling for is: “Hey, guess what getting in early with a bit more support might save?” I would love to see how the government approaches that question. That is really at the heart of the action of this motion.

On behalf of the Canberra Liberals, I will be supporting Mr Emerson's amendment. Subject to my expectations being met, I think we are going to end up with an amended motion that really reflects the commitment of all of us to support the community sector, recognising the realities of having to run a budget. Some of my discussions with Ms Orr touched on that. Speaking as someone in the alternative government in this place, I recognise that challenge as well.

I thank Miss Nuttall for bringing this forward and for the collegiate approach taken by Miss Nuttall and Ms Orr, bringing the Canberra Liberals along with them on a journey to give a message from this Assembly that says: “We love and value our community sector. We love and value our volunteers. We thank them for the savings that they make, and not just to government. We thank them for health and the prevention of harm that they initiate in our community to, basically, make the lives of the people who live in our city much healthier, much better and more enriched.

Mr Emerson's amendment agreed to.

MS ORR (Yerrabi—Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, Minister for Climate Change, Environment, Energy and Water, Minister for Disability, Carers and Community Services and Minister for Seniors and Veterans) (5.16): I, too, would like to acknowledge the extensive and collegial engagement and collaboration from all members—and, in particular, from Miss Nuttall's office. I do not think that our two offices have spent quite so much time together as we have in the last few days.

Certainly, that will give an indication, for anyone who is watching online, or reading the *Hansard* in the future, that there has been a lot of work put into this. It is fair to say that that goes across all groupings within this Assembly. I think that now goes for Mr Cain as well. We have not had a lot of crossover in our portfolios, but we have now had a chance to hang out. I think it is the start of a beautiful friendship, to quote from a famous movie.

I would like to make a few points here. The ACT government is committed to continuing to provide the community services that support people within our community. In particular, informed by evidence, the ACT government makes careful decisions about which services and supports we deliver, and when it funds non-government organisations to provide those services.

The ACT government does need to ensure that new funding allocated to the community sector aligns with our commitments and critical priorities, and that is determined through our ACT budget processes. Details about funding for services and delivery of services through community sector organisations are provided and reflected in our budget papers.

We do, year on year, provide additional funding to the community sector. That includes the CSI indexation, which changes year on year, depending on the costs relating to inflation. In the last budget, we had approximately \$8 million, at a CSI rate of 3.35 per cent, which was applied to all our community sector contracts, to reflect changes in underlying wages and prices.

This was reflected in Miss Nuttall's comments, and some other members' comments as well, in talking about this motion and about the pressures on which the community sector has been advocating, in meeting increased demand across the community, and in looking at population growth and so forth. This has been an ongoing conversation that we have had. It is certainly one that the government remains committed to having.

Miss Nuttall noted that that goes to the first part of her "calls on" in the motion—paragraph (3)(a), which calls on an increase to the funding boost over the forwards to \$20 million per year for the next few years. While I can certainly appreciate that people want to increase that funding boost, government does need to consider, through its budget process, when it comes to such large amounts of money, whether that money is being used appropriately, as per the Financial Management Act.

I would note that, while I absolutely believe that Miss Nuttall's intentions are genuine, and that she wants to see the sector supported, the boost is a bit of a blunt instrument. We have seen that with the boost here, and we acknowledged that when we put it out. Some feedback that we have already received is that there are some organisations that require a bit more support than others. The sector would like to see that reflected in future funding supports.

We continue to work through that, with the boost being for two years, while we work through a broader community reform program. That is the sort of thing that we are looking for—continuing that for a longer period of time. That means we would continue to apply a blunt measure without actually getting to the substantive issues that we want to address.

I note that ACTCOSS, in their budget submission, asked for an uplift of \$20 million from the 2027-28 financial year. Miss Nuttall addressed the difference between the ACTCOSS submission and the Greens' motion, with respect to those timings. They said that they would like this to be for two years, to allow for the reform project to be worked through, in order to look at those longer sustainability and funding issues that have been at the crux of so many conversations. I will not repeat them, because we have already gone over quite a few of them.

In moving the motion, and with the call that Miss Nuttall has made there, there are a few different perspectives. The Greens have one, the government will have one and the sector has one. I am sure Mr Cain, Mr Emerson and Ms Carrick will all have one. The government will therefore move amendments, just to reflect that we need to be a little more considered when it comes to the different perspectives that are there. We should also look at the nuances of the need and work through the longer term reform, in order to move beyond the temporary blunt measures. While those measures are appreciated, they might not necessarily go to the substantive issues that we have sought to address through these wider pieces of work.

Mr Speaker, I seek leave to move my amendments together.

Leave granted.

MS ORR: I move:

1. After paragraph (2)(c), insert:
 - (d) the ACT Greens have called on the Government to consider an uplift of the current \$10 million funding boost over 2 years to \$20 million per year over the forward estimates as part of the 2026-27 Budget process;"
2. Omit all words in paragraphs (3)(a), (3)(b) and (3)(e), substitute:
 - “(a) respond to the submissions from ACTCOSS, the broader community sector, and the Assembly about the ongoing financial sustainability of the sector, including through consideration of a further uplift in funding over the forward estimates beyond the 2025-26 initiative that provided a \$10 million uplift over two years;
 - (b) as part of reviewing ACT community sector indexation, consider the impacts of mandatory increases to superannuation, long service leave, and insurance costs to better reflect actual costs pressures in the year pressures are felt;
 - (e) noting the sector-wide climate-resilience initiatives pilot program is coming to its program completion, explore with the sector the ways the Government can enable the sector to continue to respond and adapt to the impacts of climate change, including consideration of opportunities aligned with future rounds of the Disaster Ready Fund where possible; and”.

Members can now formally see what I have put forward. The government's commitment to funding the community sector certainly remains solid. It is something, though, where we need to ensure that flexibility is retained, in order to allocate funding

to both continuing and emerging priorities. New funding needs to be allocated in ways that align with government commitments and critical priorities, it needs to be determined through the budget process, and it needs to meet our responsibilities under the Financial Management Act, as well as the other legislation and cabinet processes that we, as an executive, sign up to follow, and must follow, as part of our responsibilities.

I appreciate that there is probably a little bit of polite expectation management, given the enthusiasm behind this particular motion. I note that, with the Assembly moving a motion, we will definitely hear the expression of opinion of the Assembly on this motion. While we certainly agree with it in principle, there will be a little bit of scope as to how it is applied, given that we have a lot of considerations through our statutory and executive processes that we will need to take into account. I appreciate that the rest of the chamber do not necessarily have to be bound by those, and that sometimes gives them a little more freedom to be bolder in the action they take.

With respect to ACTCOSS's submission, I have noted that there is a little bit of a difference of opinion. The other one is the very complex indexation for community sector organisations—the CSI formula. In the very long discussions that we have had this week, a lot of them involved explaining this mathematical equation. It has probably given me a little bit of trauma, having regard to year 12 maths, but we got there, nonetheless.

The government recognises with the indexation formula that, again, there will always be questions as to whether it can be improved. That is why we review it in the lead-up to every budget. In the past we have made adjustments where there were significant changes—usually, where funding awards have been increased—to make sure that we were accounting for those changes.

The CSI formula is not the only mechanism for ensuring sector sustainability. We need to make sure that we are using it appropriately. It is there to ensure that the value of the funding for which the contract has been given is maintained, and to help organisations to meet what are predominantly wage-related or administrative costs. It is not a mechanism for looking at demand, need or priority. These belong to needs identification, service system planning and design, and ongoing monitoring processes in the commissioning of human services. Contract arrangements themselves should also address the costs of service and agreed level of service. Those arrangements are the responsibility of both government and the organisation to ensure that the true costs are being addressed.

In looking to make CSI potentially do a range of other things, we also need to be careful that we are not duplicating, that we are not putting in place a measure that is not quite fit for purpose and that disadvantages the community sector because it does not quite reflect how it would work or not work in practice.

The government will always remain open to feedback on the CSI formula; I dare say that we will continue to get it every year, considering that we review that formula every year before the budget. Again, adjusting the formula to include the costs—particularly costs that should, in best practice, sit in baseline contract arrangements—would reduce flexibility in future contracting and open the door to the expectation of trying to make

this formula potentially do too much. Again, it is an area where the intention can be sound, but it is about making sure that it works in practice in the way that we want it to. That is what we need to be checking off.

The other part we have covered is contract renewals and having those in advance. The motion is quite extensive, Mr Speaker, so bear with me. Certainly, the government is on record as saying we are happy to look at that. Where it is practicable to do that, it is something about which we can have an ongoing discussion. I note that a lot of programs might not be intended to be multi-year, or they might not be of a duration that allows for a lot of consideration and evaluation. With a 12-month program, if you start to make a decision six months in, as to whether you are going to renew it, you might not necessarily have the evidence base there. Again, we will need to work through the nuance and the complexity; giving blanket commitments needs to be considered a little bit more.

I will touch briefly on the MEA negotiations. I know this one is a little puzzling. It is a bit of a novel experience. It is the first time, from my understanding, that the ACT government have been joined as a party to the negotiations of two other parties, but they are not bargaining or negotiating themselves. I will not go into the specifics of the processes that are currently before Fair Work, because there is a commitment to act in good faith through these negotiations and to respect the process, without taking it outside the bargaining room.

It is fair to say that it has been quite a learning experience and an adventure for everyone who has been involved, including even the Fair Work Commissioner at times. It is one that we will continue to work through with employers and employees, as to how government, as a joiner to the proceedings, can best inform their negotiating process. I would note that it is their negotiating process, and we have to respect that position, our position and the nuances between them.

In closing, I will give everyone a final reminder. Even though I have provided a number of statements and updates as to the government's broader sector reform work, again, I point to our election commitments on looking at population indexation, the social compact refresh, establishing a unit within the public service to support the community sector and to build capability, progressing the sustainability program, and looking at evaluating the commissioning approach.

I would note that the first commitment has been delivered—looking at the population adjustment. Certainly, in particular, when we looked at subpopulation categories, it was not always reflective of the actual demand need. It was not something that government wanted to look at, but, as we had all these other commitments, there was scope to address the substantive issues by looking at something that was a bit more fit for purpose and that addressed the issues.

Moving on from there, we are looking at coming out very shortly with the social compact and with a look at our commissioning processes. We are in the very early stages of commencing targeted consultation, in order to get feedback from some of the community sector, so that what is likely to be quite a substantial piece of work is shaped up before we go out to the public. I will have more to say on that in due course.

With the social compact, we could have gone out in December, but, through conversations with the community sector and with ACTCOSS, we have agreed to combine it with the others and, rather than doing one process after the other, expedite it by doing things together.

With the policy unit, we are looking to set it up, as part of the MoGs, within HCSD. That is one where there has been a lot of work, thought and consideration, which members might not necessarily have seen, given to how this unit could be quite effective in supporting the public service in their relationships with the sector, and providing that point of contact for the sector with the government.

We will continue to work through the MEA commitments. We will start addressing other commitments that we have in that long list. It is not a short piece of reform work. Again, the government definitely remains committed to these pieces of reform. We really want to go to some of the substantive issues on which, it is fair to say, there have been discussions for a very long period of time. We want to see whether we can finally resolve some of these.

MS STEPHEN-SMITH (Kurrajong—Minister for Health, Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Finance and Minister for the Public Service) (5.31): I thank Miss Nuttall for bringing forward the motion. I want to take the opportunity to update the Assembly on the state of the ACT's community facilities leased to our community organisations and the work underway to refresh those.

The government owns 31 community centres, youth centres and multi-use hubs across the territory, not including not-for-profit early childhood education centres, and not including the facilities that are not managed by Infrastructure Canberra. Across these 31 buildings, there are 100 tenancies. Of those, 21 operate on peppercorn arrangements, 74 are on community-rate licences, and five are on commercial-rate licences. These figures matter because they speak directly to the scale of community service delivery being supported by government-owned facilities—support that is often referenced but not always well understood.

Many of these buildings date from the 1960s to the 1980s, and they require an increasing level of reactive maintenance—something that I, and maybe some others, can relate to. Very few of these buildings are less than 30 years old, and the average age is around 41 years. As a result, Infrastructure Canberra currently spends approximately \$5 million a year to keep these 31 centres and hubs operational.

Sometimes there tends to be an assumption that community facilities are not prioritised, or they simply tick along without investment or attention. The reality is quite different. We recognise, and have been clear, that substantial upgrades and preventive repairs are needed.

In 2024-25, Infrastructure Canberra allocated almost \$4.4 million across 28 separate projects. These included lift upgrades, roofing works, compliance improvements, heating, ventilation and air-conditioning replacements, and amenity upgrades. In 2025-26, more than \$5.2 million was allocated across 21 projects, again focused on structural improvements, HVAC amenities, compliance and lifts. This is not simply cosmetic work. This is the essential, but often invisible, work that keeps the doors open for

community organisations that rely on these spaces.

As I noted earlier, many of our community centre tenants operate under peppercorn and community licence renewals. These arrangements recognise the community benefit provided by these organisations and their contribution in lieu of rent—namely, covering the first \$500 of repairs and maintenance.

Across both peppercorn and discounted community rental arrangements, the territory forgoes approximately \$13 million in revenue each year, as outlined in the 2024-25 Infrastructure Canberra annual report. This reflects the difference between what market rent would be and the community rate arrangements that we offer. These arrangements have developed over time, until we got to a situation where there were multiple different leases and licences across the portfolio, significantly complicating tenancy management.

The peppercorn licence renewal program is now well underway, with the final tenant consultation meetings concluding this month. Following that, Infrastructure Canberra will commence renewing all licences—excluding arts organisations, which are subject to a different process—whether they are currently in holdover or formally scheduled for renewal. This work will occur over the next three months.

These renewals will use a modernised standard form of licence, ensuring all tenants operate under consistent terms and conditions. Following this, in the second half of 2026, Infrastructure Canberra will undertake the next round of licence renewals for those in holdover on community-rate licences.

At the same time, we are building new facilities and proactively considering where there might be opportunities to refresh and replace our ageing community facilities. A recent small example was the opening of Carers ACT's new day respite facility in Spence, which is operating out of an Infrastructure Canberra building that had been refreshed for the purpose.

A new Woden community centre is funded. While I recognise that there have been delays, I am confident that we will have a positive announcement on this in the not-too-distant future and, through this, we will deliver a new home for Woden Community Service. The incredible new home for Gugan Gulwan Youth Aboriginal Corporation opened last year, replacing an ageing facility that was no longer fit for purpose.

Many of our largest non-government organisations work in the health sector, of course. Later this year, we will be opening three new community facilities in Watson—modern homes for Marymead CatholicCare's Youth Mental Health Services and the Ted Noffs youth alcohol and drug rehabilitation program, as well as a purpose-built Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander residential rehabilitation facility. These build on recent investments to modernise the residential rehabilitation facilities that are home to Karralika and Toora.

More broadly, the Health and Community Services Directorate is currently undertaking a strategic review of community health assets to develop a long-term program for the upgrade, renewal and construction of these community facilities across Canberra. With the machinery of government changes, and while I am conveniently wearing the public

service hat as well, I have asked that this work also consider the needs of the community services side of the directorate and engage collaboratively with Infrastructure Canberra.

Of course, we recognise the importance of engaging key stakeholders, including NGO partners, in the development of this program to ensure that community facilities are in the right location, are functional for staff, welcoming for consumers and carers, and environmentally sustainable. The aim of this work is to produce an overarching pathway for the upgrade and renewal of existing facilities and the construction of new facilities.

In summary, we have a large, ageing community facilities portfolio with significant maintenance needs. We have ongoing capital investment. We have substantial forgone revenue in recognition of community value, a structured renewal program is underway, and there is ongoing work to understand future needs and opportunities. I appreciate the opportunity to speak to the large amount of work in this space and provide an update to the Assembly.

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) (5.37): I rise today to speak in support of Minister Orr's amendments to Miss Nuttall's motion.

I want to start by acknowledging the critical services provided for our community every day by our community sector organisations. Since I took on the portfolio for the Prevention of Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence, I have had lots of opportunities to visit these organisations, meet their staff and learn more about their incredibly important work. The deep commitment, care and expertise of the staff in these organisations, who support people through some of the most difficult times in their life, never fails to impress me. I want personally to thank them for all the work that they do.

When people can access the support they need, whether they are victim-survivors, people who choose to use violence, or people with experiences of trauma or marginalisation, our whole community benefits. I have heard firsthand how transformative these services can be for individuals and our community.

I want to acknowledge the very real pressures, financial and otherwise, which weigh on these organisations. Working with families where family violence is present is inherently high risk. Providing counselling to victim-survivors of sexual violence involves daily exposure to traumatic material. Beyond these coalface pressures, I appreciate the complex work of boards, CEOs and senior managers in managing budgets, protecting the psychosocial welfare of staff, and advocating for change.

The work of government in managing funding for the provision of social services is also complex. We must ensure that the investment decisions we are making are effective, targeted and responsive to the needs of the community. Those needs are multifaceted and ever changing.

In the domestic, family and sexual violence sector, research, data and best practice must underpin strategic investment across the continuum of support, from primary prevention and early intervention, through to response, recovery and healing. We must

ensure government services and the community are also engaged in our efforts to prevent and respond to domestic, family and sexual violence. We cannot make the progress which is urgently needed to drive down rates of violence without working together.

That is why I will be launching the ACT's 10-year Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Strategy in mid-2026. This will guide future work and investment in this area. We have to make sure that we are prioritising investment in the right places, and we have to do this in conversation with the community sector.

Part (3)(e) of Miss Nuttall's motion refers to utilising rounds 4 and 5 of the Disaster Ready Fund where possible. The commonwealth-led Disaster Ready Fund provides an opportunity for the state and territory governments and the community sector to submit applications to fund projects that address the physical and social impacts of disasters on our communities. It is the commonwealth that sets the requirements for this fund, the application process and what applications are considered and chosen to continue—disasters that can be caused by climate change and other natural hazards.

Disaster Ready Fund round 4 applications are expected to be open before mid-2026, and we are working with the commonwealth to understand the revised guidelines for the next round of applications, to ensure that we can secure the full quantum of commonwealth funding for territory and community sector projects.

I am committed to working with my ministerial colleagues to ensure our community has access to the right services, in the right places, which can deliver the outcomes we need. That responsibility is incumbent on all of us, and we will ensure that we continue to build a city that is safe and equitable for everyone.

MR RATTENBURY (Kurrajong) (5.41): I am pleased to speak in support of Miss Nuttall's motion this afternoon, having watched the preparation she has put into this. I know it has been extensive. There has been a real commitment to the consultation she has undertaken in chatting to the sector and the negotiation that has gone on this week to try and land at a place that this Assembly can agree to, that actually moves us forward. That is the important part of this. We need to move forward.

We have heard this afternoon, through this discussion, a lot of praise for the community sector. I am encouraged by that, because one of the privileges we have as members of this place is to meet with a lot of community sector organisations, and we have a really good idea of the difference they make in our community. The comments made this afternoon have been quite heartfelt, and I welcome the words of members in their contributions.

The bottom line is that words are not enough. This is a sector whose staff, volunteer boards, volunteers and CEOs put their heart and soul into the work they do. These are not just jobs; these are callings. These are people who come along with passion. They put their heart and soul into it. But the cold, hard reality is that reports are showing staff are burnt out, they are stressed, they are suffering fatigue, and they feel guilt, because they cannot meet the demand that is coming through their front door.

We have significant risk being shifted from the government on to this sector because

we know this sector is dealing with some of the most difficult circumstances in our community. We have staff who are unsure whether they are going to retain their jobs. We have CEOs who are having to take a decision as to whether or not they start a round of redundancies, because they do not know whether they are going to get their funding. They have to go to the press, maybe, to get it sorted out and to get a bit of a half-baked commitment that something is coming in the budget. We have a sector that is being short-changed.

This sector do not need mealy-mouthed words in this place. They need a genuine financial catch-up. The work that ACTCOSS did in the lead-up to the last ACT election, where they drew a really important distinction regarding the community sector index rates that are applied each year—the gap between that and what they have seen in population growth and demand—was a really important piece of work. It was certainly a light bulb moment for me. They highlighted that the increase in population had well outstripped the growth in the funding they have received.

There has been quite some debate since then. I have been involved in some of those discussions, where people have said, “Probably a population-based answer is not quite right. It’s not nuanced enough.” I can accept that intellectually, but, at the end of the day, we have not seen a correction. We have not seen the catch-up that is sorely needed, and that is what we are trying to talk about in this place today—the necessity of that catch-up.

For all the fine words we have heard here this afternoon, what I have not heard is a genuine commitment to address that. I have heard expressions like, “We need to do some polite expectation management.” “We need to retain flexibility.” “We need to continue to work through that.” I have heard those phrases before. As Mr Emerson’s amendment noted, in supply-and-confidence agreements, ACT Labor committed to reviewing funding for the community sector prior to the 2025-26 budget. That was the one that came out last year, in case those dates are not clear for anyone listening to the debate. That was last year’s budget. And here we are, coming up to the 2026-27 budget, and there is still not clarity.

When we negotiated post election, we got those words. We got, “We need to continue to work through that. It’s nuanced. We don’t quite have the formula. We don’t want to use a blunt instrument.” We had those discussions in November 2024 and we were told, “Give us a bit of time. We’ll get it sorted out.” We got to the 2025-26 budget and we got this little top-up, that averaged out to \$30,000 an organisation, which does not even cover the cost, probably, of leasing a car that those organisations might need to deliver their services.

I am frustrated by this because we have come in here today and said, “It’s time for some specific commitments.” It is about finding, in a nine-point-something-billion-dollar ACT budget, an extra top-up for the community sector that they sorely need. As Mr Cain rightly pointed out, it will deliver savings to government, because we know these organisations play a key preventive role in this city. We are past the time of needing further consideration. We are past the time of needing to “continue to work through that”. We are at the point where this sector is straining. Report after report issued by ACTCOSS underlines this.

When I look at the words that Labor committed to in their 2024 position statement, they committed to act on the things we have brought before the Assembly today. One of the specifics that spoke directly to our calls was:

Within the first six months of government determine a government position on the appropriateness of applying population growth to indexation for community sector government contracts.

That was in the 2024 position statement. Folks, we are now three months into 2026. It is not fair to continue to ask this sector to strain in the way that they are straining. Miss Nuttall noted in her motion:

... in the *State of the ACT Community Sector Report 2025*, the ACT Council of Social Service (ACTCOSS) reported that 83 percent of organisations reported increased demand in 2024, compared to 67 percent in 2022 ...

ACTCOSS' 2026-2027 budget submission finds "current ACT Government indexation arrangements do not reflect the real and mandatory cost increases that community organisations must absorb" ...

This is the sort of evidence that has been put before us. These statements have been around for a while. As I say, that work that ACTCOSS did, in the run-up to the 2024 election, was a really powerful piece of analysis. As I said, it was certainly a light bulb moment for me. It drew that distinction regarding annual indexation-type funding—which is really important, and the government does do it; I am not doubting that—but it has failed to see that big step change that has caught up with us over the last decade. It is time to act. It is time to go past the fine words and future promises we have heard in this place today and deliver a financial outcome in the budget.

Whilst the motion has been modified away from the direct call that Miss Nuttall put forward for a specific commitment towards a consideration in the budget of potentially doing something, I implore the responsible ministers—those sitting in ERC—to go past the promise of future action and actually deliver for this community sector that so dearly needs it.

I commend Miss Nuttall's motion to the Assembly, and I thank her for the work she has done in putting it together.

MR STEEL (Murrumbidgee—Treasurer, Minister for Planning and Sustainable Development, Minister for Heritage and Minister for Transport) (5.49): Our government values the community sector. We welcome the important role that it plays to support vulnerable Canberrans, and we invest upwards of \$250 million in it each year to support the delivery of key frontline services: from responding to domestic, family and sexual violence to supporting access to justice, investing in our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community and providing important relief to Canberrans who are doing it tough.

Our commitment, as a government, ably led by Minister Orr, has been to respond to the concerns of the community sector about the need for sector reform to improve processes like commissioning and to ensure that community need is being considered in the context of investment. There has been quite a bit of work underway in that space,

including, based on ACTCOSS's priorities, undertaking a review into our population which was completed ahead of the last budget. Whilst we recognise that further work is necessary, the government also made an investment in the budget of \$10 million across two years to support the community sector whilst that work continues.

The government has been steadily engaging with our community sector partners and peak bodies, particularly as we commence the 2026-27 budget process, and throughout the year, to understand the pressures it is facing and to understand its priorities for government and how best the sector and the government can collaborate to deliver for Canberrans. I have heard directly from the sector, Minister Orr hears directly from them each and every day, and every Labor member of this place is in regular engagement with parts of the community sector as part of our work.

I think it is really clear that there is political consensus that we must ensure the ongoing sustainability and viability of the community sector in the ACT. That is more than about just throwing money at the sector and expecting it to swim; it is about collaboration, reform and responding to its needs. We must meaningfully engage with it, as we have been doing, to understand where there are joint needs and where investment can be best targeted, and where we can make reforms to reduce the administrative burden on the sector so that it can focus on what it does best, which is providing essential frontline services.

Investments must be targeted. They must represent the best outcome for the entire community, and they must be considered by the government through a proper budget process where balanced consideration can be given in the context of all calls on the budget, including other government and community priorities, with decisions made informed by business cases that properly justify the spend. Importantly, they must be grounded in responding to the requests of the community. We have heard that moving to parity with employment conditions in the public service is a priority, and that is why we have made that commitment, and we are working with employers, employees and their representatives to move towards that.

We have already heard that some of the most meaningful work the government can do is to support the sector to reduce administrative burden and work on reforms to commissioning, and that is why we are doing exactly that through the work led by Minister Orr.

We have heard that more needs to be done to improve reporting of where government funding is heading, particularly for Aboriginal Controlled Community Organisations, something the government has committed to do.

It is important for all members in this place to remind themselves that there are a range of responsibilities on the executive, and that the executive has prerogative and responsibility when it comes to financial matters.

The opposition likes to remind me about our responsibilities under the Financial Management Act, and ministers are also bound by the cabinet handbook. The government is mindful of these responsibilities, and we will respond to the submissions and input into the budget consultation process that the sector provides. Because this is important, the government has a regular and ongoing budget consultation process. We

publish submissions. We engage directly with those that participate. I have met with ACTCOSS about its submission. We will continue to engage in that process.

I do want to address something that has been raised specifically in this motion, which sits in my Treasury portfolio, and that relates to community sector indexation. I understand the concerns that ACTCOSS has. Indexation is not always perfect. It is a one-size-fits-all approach for every organisation. That means there are some organisations that have all their cost increases and more covered. There are also some that do not. And some years, it covers everything, and others it does not. For many organisations, CSI has covered those fixed cost increases like mandatory superannuation and long service leave, and for others it has not.

I consider the feedback of the sector in reviewing the CSI each year. The government will consider the formula this year, considering the input parameters, the feedback from the sector and the advice from Treasury. It is important to be clear that CSI is not meant to manage increases in fixed costs that are known to all employers in advance; its role is to ensure that funding grows to cover expected increases in service delivery.

We have gone above that with the community sector funding boost. We recognise there are further pressures on the sector, and we want it to be sustainable, but there are responsibilities of every employer—the government, the private sector or the community sector—that employers manage.

The government will continue to engage with the sector, listen to it and respond to its input into the budget consultation process. The government recognises the invaluable role the sector plays in the ACT, particularly in supporting our most vulnerable members of the community. We will continue to engage with the sector directly to address how we can work together to support its ongoing sustainability and ensure its ongoing success into the future with the reform program that is underway. I commend Minister Orr's amendment to the Assembly.

MISS NUTTALL (Brindabella) (5.56): To reassure whips and managers of government business, I will speak to these amendments, move my own in the process and then have a short closing speech. I do not want to keep people here too late.

I would like to thank the minister for putting forward these amendments and genuinely appreciate the amount of time she and her team have spent with me and my team working through them. I think they were developed with a genuine intent to find consensus and a productive way through. Inevitably, there will be things that we disagree on, and I think these amendments speak to a fundamental difference in approach.

I think it is fair to say that in the Greens, we prefer clear calls that minimise government's ability to turn around and say, "We've considered something," without them making the change we need them to make. We are pretty attached to that \$20 million per year figure. It is clear, based on the state of the sector survey that, despite the \$5 million per year boost which began last year, community sector organisations still, at this point in time, do not have the money to run sustainably.

The government's funding boost, which acknowledges that the sector is underfunded

and unsustainable, has not fully addressed the concerns it was meant to. This morning my Labor Brindabella colleague Mr Werner-Gibbins said words to the effect of, “If the Greens and the opposition are going to criticise Labor’s spending priorities, give us a figure.” So that is what we are doing. We are not shying away from the need in front of us. We have seen and heard sufficient evidence, from the community sector and from the people they support, that a \$20 million per year uplift is necessary if we do not want to lose good services that help good people. I accept that this might not be the view of the majority of the Assembly, which is a shame.

I genuinely would like to see more from the Canberra Liberals and the Labor government in terms of putting their money where their mouth is. I encourage them to seriously consider the value that community organisations provide and, if nothing else, the amount of money we save when we invest in supporting people before things reach a crisis point.

Given that motions are to express the will of the Assembly, I feel that they are a completely appropriate place to make our expectations clear to government that they fund the things that matter. We are also looking for a commitment to reform community sector indexation so that it accounts for the financial pressure that mandatory increases in workers’ entitlements puts on organisations. I would say that, as to the Treasurer’s comments earlier about increases in cost pressures—and that would be one of them, importantly, in the year that those cost pressures are felt—these are expenses that organisations cannot opt out of if they want to be ethical employers, as they generally do. When government is not covering uplift in funds, it reduces what these organisations are able to do to help people.

We are also wanting to provide clearer lines of accountability when it comes to who does what on climate-ready buildings. Mind you, these are the organisations that kick into even higher gear when we face climate-driven disasters. They were the ones who distributed masks to essential workers and vulnerable people during the bush fire season. They probably can and will do that again. They need the buildings to do that. The pressures on the community sector organisations absolutely surge during climate-driven disaster, and their work does not stop during the heatwave.

So at this point in time, I would like to move my amendments to Ms Orr's amendments to my motion.

I move:

Omit all words in paragraphs (3)(b) and (3)(e), substitute:

- “(b) as part of reviewing ACT community sector indexation, fully incorporate the impacts of mandatory increases to superannuation, long service leave, and insurance costs to better reflect actual costs pressures in the year pressures are felt where possible and practicable;
- (e) noting the sector-wide climate-resilience initiatives pilot program is coming to its program completion, work with the sector to continue to respond and adapt to the impacts of climate change, including through opportunities aligned with future rounds of the Disaster Ready Fund where possible;”.

While we welcome the factual additions from the Labor government, we are concerned that the original amendments that I seek to amend, move this away from what our motion sought to do. I am moving amendments to strengthen the language so it is clear that we expect government to reform community sector indexation to incorporate mandatory employment and insurance costs and to work with the sector to leverage initiatives like the Disaster Ready Fund. I believe that in doing so, right now, we are landing the strongest version of this language that the majority of the Assembly will support. It is not as strong as what we wanted, but it is progress that will nevertheless, hopefully, provide some value to the community sector, which is the whole point of this.

ACT Labor did make clear commitments to the community sector, and my motion speaks to them. The strength of language they offered the community during the election was better than what we see today. We see that in their position statement from July 2024, and some of those points are quoted directly in my motion today. We even see that, as Mr Rattenbury pointed out before, in the supply and confidence agreement that they have with us, the Greens, and Mr Emerson. I am genuinely surprised that we have faced as much resistance to stronger wording as we have, given their views on record and their commitments to the people of Canberra.

Just very briefly on the minister's comments on population-based funding, while it is fresh in my mind—I do not think the question of population level increases is resolved. I read the report the government commissioned, and it has not said, "We're fine with our population that will increase." It said, "It is not a perfect fix. There may be better measures, and the matter needs further consideration if we want to accurately account for increasing demand for community services." It is not a done deal, and it is not something we should put in the too-hard basket.

Nevertheless, I am hopeful our amendment will be supported. I thank the minister for her constructive engagement to make sure the changes were ultimately supportable. I am moving them because I believe they will make a meaningful difference to the community sector.

Miss Nuttall's amendment to **Ms Orr's** proposed amendment agreed to.

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

MISS NUTTALL (Brindabella) (6.02): In closing, briefly, I appreciate the constructive tone of the debate today. I find it very helpful. I hope everyone goes and has a good sleep tonight. I have taken away three key points from this debate—one is that the community sector is underfunded, and we are not doing anything to help people. At the end of the day, this is what this whole thing is about: what kind of system helps people when they need it most and what kind of standard we should be setting for the system.

When it comes to the seriousness of homelessness, of domestic, family and sexual violence, of food relief and of all the services that we are relying on, we should fund them enough to sustainably meet the whole need in front of them. What is the alternative? If we are not prepared to meet the full cost of community services, the corollary is that we are okay with a certain number of people going hungry, going without accommodation or going without safety. I think we need to recognise that that

is the corollary of what we are saying.

Another key theme I certainly noticed is that where we disagree is on striking a balance between strong and clear calls to keep the government accountable and not being so inflexible as to lock ourselves into a perverse outcome. As someone who sits outside of government, but provides them with supply and confidence, you will be unsurprised to hear that I err more on the side of clear lines of accountability.

I do want to be clear: If the government agrees to this motion and then goes away and investigates these proposals and finds that their intent is better and more effectively served through a different mechanism, I would not be mad. Maybe they will realise that \$20 million a year is not going to cut it, and we should actually uplift the community sector funding even more. Maybe they discover a neat way of incorporating rising costs of delivery into a mechanism that is not the community sector indexation formula but reliably increases the amount of money organisations get every year to cover their insurance and super and all those other costs. I would not stand in the way of a different mechanism that achieves the outcome we are after.

But we need to be really clear about community expectations, because the sector has been clear, crystal clear, for a while that their need is there. Labor has acknowledged this need, and they have reflected it back in their election commitments. I genuinely hope and expect that the government honours the spirit of this motion, not just the letter.

I do not think that considering improvements to indexation and then dismissing them because they are too finicky will cut it. I do not think exploring opportunities to work with the sector ends in inaction. I hope that we have landed in the right place today, and we will continue to make sure the government remains accountable.

The last key theme I have taken away today is that complexity should not stop us from meeting the need in front of us, because, my goodness, community sector funding is complicated, and it is important to get it right. We found out how fraught it is just to find out whether the wage price index accurately captures changes in long service leave and the impact that these changes have on organisations' running costs. Minister Orr and the team were very patient in running through those intricacies with us.

I genuinely think that if it was easy and obvious, government would have just done it all. I think they would do it. Genuinely, I think they would do it because it is the right thing to do. Even if they did not think it was the right thing to do, they would have done it, because we are that annoying on the crossbench and they would want to shut us up! I acknowledge that complexity.

And at the same time, let's acknowledge that every minute, hour, day, month or year we spend not moving because we want to get it right, right now, is a day someone who needs a home, or enough food to survive, or safety when home is not safe for them, does not get that support. These are not the people that will complain to us. They do not have the time or the money. They are too busy trying to survive. They bear the pain and indignity that we put on them quietly, or, if they do it too loudly, we lock them up. But we know they exist. We need to make our budget-funding decisions like these people have the loudest voice in the room, because they have some of the greatest unmet need in our city.

Original question, as amended, resolved in the affirmative.

Papers

Motion to take note of papers

MR SPEAKER: Pursuant to standing order 211A, I propose the question:

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

Active Travel Plan—Assembly resolution—government response

MS CARRICK (Murrumbidgee) (6.07): I am pleased to see that the indicative timelines have now been added to the walking and cycling project map, and that the Beasley Street road narrowing project near the Sacred Heart Primary School is included. I rise to mention this due to high levels of frustration.

While the project is welcome, it is not the real safety issue, which is on Hodgson Crescent. Cars move downhill around a curve, right next to the school, leading to repeated near misses at the crossing. This is causing real stress for the school community, including the principal.

I have raised this issue in the Assembly, written to the minister and met with the directorate, yet the disconnect with the directorate about the fundamental safety issue remains. It is simply about having a speed hump to slow people coming down the hill before they reach the crossing. Across Canberra, I see many speed humps, so I have to ask: why is it so hard to get one here? It should not be easier just to go and buy one myself and drill it into the ground; can I do that?

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Statements by members

Education—Chief Minister's Student Welcome

MR BARR (Kurrajong—Chief Minister, Minister for Economic Development and Minister for Tourism and Trade) (6.08): Earlier this month, I had the pleasure of hosting the Chief Minister's Student Welcome. About a thousand students attended. There was an opportunity to talk with them about Canberra and its appeal as an education city—one of the most livable, safest and best-educated cities in the world, with the highest proportion of university-educated residents in Australia. It is a city that offers high quality, safety, career pathways, global networks—more than just a degree, Mr Speaker.

Canberra celebrates multiculturalism and celebrates that wonderful diversity. People come here to study, to work and to make a life, enriching our culture and strengthening our economy. It is very pleasing that the ACT has up to 2,000 places annually under the skilled nominated visa, subclass 190, and the skilled work regional visa, 491. Over the last three years, 80 per cent of skilled migrants nominated by the ACT have completed studies at an ACT tertiary institution.

Over the last four years, Study Canberra has funded over a thousand student places in the Study Australia Industry Experience Program, which is a free virtual industry experience program in which students gain experience working on real problems with real employers over a two-week period.

I was also able to mention—and this is very popular, Mr Speaker—that the ACT government is a possible employment option for students who choose to stay in Canberra after their studies. If you hold a current Australian visa with work rights, you are eligible to apply for ACT public service roles.

Canberra Balloon Spectacular—Lions Club fundraiser

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) (6.10): There are just three days left of the Canberra Balloon Spectacular. It has become one of our city's brightest traditions, now drawing over 40,000 people each year. While there is much to celebrate about the festival, there is another special anniversary worth noting.

The Lions Club of Canberra Belconnen has been serving breakfast with the balloons for 40 years this year—for about as long as the balloon festival itself. The Belconnen Lions catering is legendary, whether for the purpose of service or fundraising, and it is the breakfasts over these nine days of the festival that are the single largest fundraiser each year for the club, raising tens of thousands of dollars net for the Belconnen Lions to fulfil their service obligations to the community.

The Lions menu is a Canberra classic—full or light brekkies, pancakes, pancakes with bacon, and proper tea and coffee. Prices are exceptionally reasonable and, of course, all the funds raised go to good causes. Most importantly, I refer to the hours of service that the volunteers give. Over nine days, it is about a thousand hours, which is quite incredible. All those funds raised are donated back into our local community, with many notable donations over the years.

Mr Speaker, when you are enjoying the spectacle and saying hi to Finley the Turtle over the next three days, do enjoy a breakfast courtesy of the Belconnen Lions and give them your thanks.

Ginninderra electorate—Hawker Community Repair Cafe

MR CAIN (Ginninderra) (6.11): I want to speak again about the wonderful Hawker Community Repair Café. Last Sunday, they held their latest quarterly Community Repair Café at the Hawker International Softball Centre, and great credit goes to the softball centre and its team, and the Hawker Men's Shed, who drive this wonderful initiative in Belconnen.

The repair café runs quarterly, usually on the third Sunday of March, June, September and December, from 10 am until 1 pm. It is an outstanding event that strengthens community connections. It helps to reduce landfill and, obviously, of particular relevance at this time, it saves households lots of dollars, because items can be repaired without having to be replaced, and that saves households so much money. Alongside

the repair work that goes on, the markets continue to thrive, with dozens of stalls at times turning up to show their wares, local produce, artists, food products, craft and arts, and community representative bodies as well.

I want to commend the teams at the Hawker Men's Shed and the Hawker Softball Centre. I look forward to attending the next one in June this year.

Discussion concluded.

Adjournment

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

That the Assembly do now adjourn.

Voluntary assisted dying—telehealth restrictions

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) (6.13): This is the third speech in a series of speeches I have given this week about voluntary assisted dying and the restrictions on the use of telehealth.

The anecdotes that I spoke of yesterday are not edge cases; these are the predictable, documented consequences of a commonwealth law that has not been updated to reflect the legal landscape in which it is operating. We suspected it; then the Federal Court determined beyond doubt in 2023 that offences relating to suicide-related material, and the promotion of such through the use of a carriage service, capture communications about voluntary assisted dying conducted under state and territory law.

Commonwealth criminal offences are capturing lawful voluntary assisted dying communications. Telehealth, email, a phone call: criminal, if they relate to voluntary assisted dying. And who does this hurt? Not people who can travel, not people with energy and resources. It hurts people who are frail, housebound, dying in regional and remote communities—people for whom a trip to the clinic, the hospital, their GP or their surgeon is not an inconvenience; it is an ordeal.

Let me be clear: none of my points this week have been about asking anyone to change their view on voluntary assisted dying. It is about asking the federal parliament to accept that, where a state or territory has made something lawful, the commonwealth should not be inadvertently criminalising it. It is not controversial. It is not complicated, despite what has been claimed by some federal ministers. It is a drafting fix. The federal parliament has had years, involving a court decision, a private member's bill and repeated ministerial representations, to act on it.

With respect to our federal parliamentarians who handed back our right to make legislation for ourselves on voluntary assisted dying in particular, it certainly feels hypocritical that they took up the fight on that, yet they continue to leave laws sitting on the books which undermine voluntary assisted dying for Australians as a whole.

It is hurting people. It is causing injury, moral injury, to our selfless practitioners who enable the voluntary assisted dying frameworks, and it is beyond frustrating. Actually, I just cannot believe that there is political convenience dressed up as inaction. That is not a principled position, and it does not sit right with me that, less than three years ago, we had federal parliamentarians championing territory rights, democratic rights, yet at the same time they are leaving laws on the books that are restricting the right to access health care for every Australian.

People are suffering because of this. People are dying without access to the care that this Assembly, their own state parliaments and the federal parliament have said they were entitled to. Every day of delay by the federal parliament is a choice. Our federal parliament can do better, and it must.

Faith—Eid

MR CAIN (Ginninderra) (6.17): Tomorrow, I am very reliably informed by a local Muslim leader, is Eid, the end of Ramadan for this year. I want to step through some of my delightful engagements with our Muslim and other faith group communities through this period of Ramadan—often in company with the shadow minister for multicultural affairs, my colleague Ms Barry, who I know had her own set of visits and iftar dinners with our Muslim and interfaith communities.

The first event that I attended was a Ramadan iftar dinner reception hosted by the Islamic Practice and Dawah Circle. It was a national gathering. We had federal politicians there, as well as local members. It was good to see people travelling from interstate to Canberra for this gathering.

I was delighted to join the Bluestar community organisation, which encourages interfaith dialogue and tolerance, many of whom, obviously, are connected with the Muslim faith, for a social cohesion and shared humanity iftar dinner at the Press Club in late February. Both of those events were in late February, as was the third one that I will speak of, hosted in the electorate of Ginninderra at the Kippax Uniting Church. It was a delightful opportunity to meet with local community organisations and other faith representatives to celebrate the breaking of the fast with our Muslim community.

I joined the Minister for Multicultural Affairs at the Ramadan iftar dinner at the Gungahlin Mosque in early March. I know Ms Barry had her own gathering for that one. It was a delightful opportunity to join a growing population in Gungahlin, as well as those from other parts of Canberra, who came to celebrate this particular occasion.

There was a lovely multifaith community iftar dinner, jointly sponsored by the Federation of Indian Associations of ACT and Bluestar, an interfaith social harmony Muslim community group. It was great to join with many community representatives and other faith representatives for the breaking of the fast that evening.

The last event was last Saturday, at the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in Lyneham, where the Ahmadiyya Muslim community held their iftar dinner. They are a really wonderful group of people, as are all our faith communities, with their guiding principle being “love for all, hatred for none”.

As I said on the evening—again, in company with ambassadors, other faith leaders and other MLAs, including Ms Tough, who is with us this evening—“love for all, hatred for none” would be wonderful guidance for government policy in so many areas. It might help in negotiations, as we go through the different things that happen in this chamber.

Generally speaking, there was a wonderful spirit and a wonderful message of unity, compassion, social cohesion, tolerance and mutual respect during this Ramadan season. It is an experience that I have had every time I have participated with our Muslim community. I want to acknowledge and thank them for including me, and us as parliamentarians, in their celebration: Ramadan, Eid.

Canberra Citizen of the Year 2026

MS TOUGH (Brindabella) (6.21): I rise tonight to congratulate the 2026 Canberra Citizen of the Year, Tendayi Ganga, who is a local Tuggeranong woman. She lives not far from me. It was an absolute pleasure, when I saw this morning that she has been named the 2026 Canberra Citizen of the Year. In 2019, she founded the Born to Shine organisation. Since that time, she and her team have been supporting women through mentorship, skills development, financial empowerment and family-focused events.

Tendayi moved to Canberra in 2005 and her family followed a year later. While it was a wonderful time when she first moved here and became a nurse at Canberra Hospital, it was quickly followed by some pretty dark personal times for her, which she has talked about a fair bit today in the media and at times when I have met her.

With the help of some really close friends, after she went through a divorce, she pulled herself together. She attributes it to prayers and friends. She now uses her experience to help younger people in the community, mostly, to find their feet and find themselves, and make sure that they do not feel alone. She does that so well.

Last year, I had the privilege of attending part of her first mother-daughter event against domestic violence. It was a day that brought together people from the community sector who work on the front line of domestic violence and women, mostly from African communities and other migrant communities—mothers and daughters. It was a really safe space where people could talk about their experience and hear from people on the ground.

It is incredible to see how she has taken her personal experience and turned it into benefiting the wider community. I congratulate her a lot on doing this, and I look forward to seeing what she and her team do with Born to Shine in the future. Congratulations.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

The Assembly adjourned at 6.24 pm until Tuesday, 24 March 2026 at 10 am.

Schedule of amendments

Schedule 1

Crimes Legislation Amendment Bill 2025 (No 2)

Amendments moved by the Attorney-General

1

Clause 2 (2)

Page 2, line 9—

omit

3 months

substitute

6 months

2

Clause 70

Page 44, line 2—

[oppose the clause]

3

Clause 71

Page 44, line 7—

[oppose the clause]

4

Clause 72

Page 44, line 13—

[oppose the clause]
