



DEBATES
OF THE
LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
FOR THE
AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

DAILY HANSARD

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27 May 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 **Friday, 19 June 2026**.

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Wednesday, 27 May 2026

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

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

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

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

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

Petitions

The following petitions were lodged for presentation:

Wombats—bare-nosed wombats—petitions 15-26 and 49-26

By Ms Clay, from 2565 and 558 residents, respectively:

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

The following residents of the ACT draw the attention of the Assembly to recommendations that could introduce killing of local Bare-Nosed Wombats in the ACT as a land management practice that would be unmonitored and result in unacceptable animal welfare outcomes.

A draft technical report titled *Managing Wombats* proposes options including reclassifying wombats as a Controlled Native Species, if adopted, this proposal would allow the killing of wombats. This shift is proposed despite the draft report acknowledging there are no reliable population estimates of wombats, no systems for reporting or verifying leaseholder complaints, and that it relies on anecdotal input from only three out of 381 rural leaseholders.

If wombats are declared a Controlled Native Species, a public servant can authorise leaseholders to shoot wombats without any transparency or scrutiny of the decision-making process. Once authorised, killing on rural properties cannot be monitored and creates serious animal welfare risks, including wounding rather than instant death and the orphaning of dependent young.

Such harm is incompatible with the ACT's legislated recognition of animal sentience and its commitment to deterring and preventing animal cruelty and the abuse and neglect of animals.

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

1. Rule out the declaration of Bare-Nosed Wombats as a Controlled Native Species and reject any policy promoting the killing of wombats by landholders.
2. Require that all wombat-related policies use non-lethal, evidence-based coexistence strategies and provide leaseholders with the support needed to implement them.
3. Ensure all wombat-related policies uphold the ACT's legislated recognition that animals are sentient beings with intrinsic value and deserve to be treated with compassion and have a quality of life that reflects their intrinsic value.

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

Planning—Griffith—petitions 29-26 and 50-26

By Ms Lee, from 170 and 1657 residents, respectively:

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

The following residents of the ACT and the Griffith Narrabundah Community Association (GNCA) draw the attention of the Assembly to Draft Major Plan Amendment 06 (DPA-06) – the Inner South Health Centre (HC). DPA-06 proposes to rezone and use open space and parkland behind the Griffith shops for a large, two-storey, \$22m facility, providing a restricted range of health services, by appointment only, during standard weekday business hours.

The building's bulk will dominate the landscape, constrained parking will affect local businesses, and the site lacks accessible public transport.

Disappointed inner south residents were led to believe the facility would offer similar services to the popular Walk-In Centres at Belconnen, Gungahlin, Dickson, Tuggeranong and Weston Creek.

The ACT government has now declared the HC to be a Territory Priority Project (TPP) which will preclude appeals by residents.

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

Reconsider the location of the proposed Health Centre in order to protect the character, established trees and amenity of the open space and recreational parkland behind the Griffith shops, and instead utilise currently zoned community facility land in either Manuka or Kingston Group Centres, or in Eastlake or its vicinity;

Provide a full range of Walk-In services;

Consider inner south residents' future needs; undertake genuine, open consultation with residents (including a town hall meeting) on the Health Centre's location,

design and service model; and

Reverse the decision to declare the Health Centre a Territory Priority Project.

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

Roads—Hindmarsh Drive and Tyagarah Street—petitions 23-26 and 51-26

By Ms Carrick, from 78 and 156 residents, respectively:

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

The following residents of the ACT draw to the attention of the Assembly long-standing concerns about the safety of the intersection of Hindmarsh Drive and Tyagarah Street in O'Malley.

As an uncontrolled intersection, there have been regular collisions over many years. Vehicles entering and exiting Tyagarah Street are forced to cross multiple lanes of 80km/h traffic and can face long delays waiting for breaks in traffic. The limited visibility of westbound traffic coming down the hill on Hindmarsh Drive greatly increases the risk of collision.

Installing traffic lights at this intersection would significantly reduce the risk of collision, supporting the ACT government's commitment to Vision Zero – no deaths or serious injuries on our road network. If sequenced with the traffic lights at the adjacent Palmer Street intersection, traffic lights at Tyagarah Street would have minimal impact on westbound traffic flow and no impact on eastbound through traffic flow.

Your petitioners, therefore, request the Assembly to call on the ACT government to install traffic lights at the intersection of Hindmarsh Drive and Tyagarah Street in O'Malley.

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

Motion to take note of petitions

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

That the petitions and responses so lodged be noted.

Wombats—bare-nosed wombats—petitions 15-26 and 49-26

MS CLAY (Ginninderra) (10.02): I seek leave to table an out-of-order petition along with the Assembly petition.

Leave granted.

MS CLAY: I table:

Petition which does not conform with the standing orders—Save our wombats—
Ms Clay (17,308 signatures).

In 2025 the Office of Nature Conservation released a draft technical report on wombat management, *Managing wombats: A review of current practice, issues and challenges to inform wombat management in the ACT*. This draft report was deeply concerning to me. There is no solid ecological science underpinning this draft report. Much of what is recorded is anecdotal. The government noted there is no formal assessment into the impact or nuisance that wombats are causing landholders. The report stated only three of our 381 were consulted, and I am certain government could do a more thorough job of collecting input.

I have since asked questions on notice, and the government has not been able to give me an estimate of wombat numbers in the ACT. Many community members shared my concern, and I was subsequently approached to sponsor this petition. This petition has been brought forward by Wombat Rescue, Animal Liberation ACT, ACT Wildlife, Animals Australia and Humane World for Animals Australia. Many of them are joining us in the gallery today. They share a call to protect wombats from moves towards policies that could enable their killing.

The petition has attracted significant public support. 3,100 signatures were received from Canberra alone. This issue has resonated far beyond Canberra. A further 13,201 Australians have supported this petition. These supporters come from major cities including Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane, Perth and Adelaide; also regional communities across the country, from Tasmania to far north Queensland, the south coast, the Blue Mountains and regional Victoria. An additional 4,107 people from around the world signed the petition, including supporters from the US, the UK, Canada and New Zealand, and countries across Europe, Asia, Africa, the Middle East and South America.

This is a strong public response. The total number is 20,464. It demonstrates that many Canberrans do not support policies that include killing wombats, and instead want the government to prioritise coexistence strategies.

Now, all native animals, including bare-nosed wombats, are protected under the Nature Conservation Act 2014. The ACT has also recognised in law that animals are sentient beings with intrinsic value, which are able to subjectively feel and perceive the world around them. That recognition has to mean something in practice.

I acknowledge this is a difficult issue. Wombats are a native animal, and their home is a colonised landscape. Colonisation has done a lot of damage to this land and its wildlife. Colonisation has not only modified the landscape, but it has disrupted ecosystems and food chains. We are only just beginning to understand how interconnected each animal and plant is to the total ecosystem; something that First Nations people have known for more time immemorial. We are now in a situation where we are managing a land that has been severely disrupted from how it was just 250 years ago.

Our farmers are an essential partner in this land management and they are also invested in caring for the land and landscape where they live and work. I have spoken to several farmers, and many do have concerns about how they can manage wombats on their properties. Problems include wombat burrow damage to infrastructure, waterways and the fences that keep foxes from attacking chickens and lambs. One farmer lost an entire tank full of water in a drought. Another has shown me the erosion in a creek bed.

We need the government to carefully consider and thoroughly study these issues and work with farmers to find solutions that are humane and effective. Farmers need support from the government to properly explore and implement non-lethal methods of coexistence. That must be the first step.

Canberra can lead the country in humane, evidence-based coexistence with wildlife. We also need the government to do their science homework, so we have a good baseline population of how many wombats we have; how many wombats our ecosystem really needs to thrive—not just over the whole of the ACT but also a true picture of localised numbers; and we need some more systematic analyses of the issues that landholders are reporting.

Wombat Rescue is committed to working collaboratively with landholders, community stakeholders and the ACT government to identify practical, humane coexistence solutions that balance environmental, agricultural and animal welfare outcomes for all involved. And the farmers want to manage the land, the plants and the animals as best they can. We can surely find a way forward on this issue, but there is much more work to be done. I will table the petition.

Wombats—bare-nosed wombats—petitions 15-26 and 49-26

MR EMERSON (Kurrajong) (10.07): I rise to speak in support of the petition that has been sponsored by Ms Clay. I first want to thank the environment and animal welfare advocates in the chamber today and those watching on at home, for their tireless work and critical efforts on this—including accruing thousands of signatures drawing attention to what I hope we will all agree is a deeply concerning issue.

Wombats, like so many of our other native species are increasingly threatened by greenfield developments and the ongoing expansion of our city edge, and, as we have all seen along so many of Canberra's arterial roads, are often killed in traffic. These are features of human choices not to prioritise these animals' lives, their sentience and habitat. And I am worried that the draft technical review that has been released continues this trend of choosing convenience over the preservation and protection of our bush capital's wildlife.

Clearly, I am not alone in this sentiment, as demonstrated by the number of signatures on this petition. This is something people do deeply care about. I met with the president of Wombat Rescue ACT, Yolandi Vermaak, earlier this year—whose critical work in rescuing wombats ensures that the human impact on their habitat is not as disastrous as it could be—and I was struck by her willingness to work with rural landholders to find solutions to these problems.

There is increasing interaction of wombats with humans, which is why her work is so

important and why I also understand the concerns raised by rural leaseholders. I have spoken with some of those rural leaseholders about this, and I accept the frustrations that come for them with wombats on their farms, including decreased safety from clutch burrows on properties and concerns regarding erosion. However, any resolution to these problems must be evidence-based and it must align recommended actions with that evidence base. It is not clear that is actually happening, at this point in time.

The initial draft report on wombat management in the ACT was released in response to a question on notice I submitted which asked for more detail on what was going on in this area. Notably, this report included a recommendation to explore and evaluate options to manage wombat populations through culling programs, similar to those currently in place for kangaroos. But this recommendation was, as Ms Clay points out, contradicted by claims within the review itself.

The review states that there are currently no reliable estimates of abundance for bare-nosed wombats in the ACT. When I followed up to ask if the government was considering meaningfully tracking wombat populations, I was informed that, while other methods for population estimates had been trialled, these were later discontinued as they were too resource intensive and ineffective.

Instead, anecdotal approximations from landholders on wombat populations were still a “good source of information”. This may be true but, in the context of a lack of any other source of knowledge on this, I struggle to see how this could be classified as a good source of information and used to justify considering culling options when there are no other reliable sources confirming population estimates.

Similarly, the report only consulted one scientist, who said more research was needed in investigating conflicts between leaseholders and bare-nosed wombats—and that this particular issue was “outside his area of expertise”.

There was no First Nations consultation either.

This is simply not enough research and not enough evidence to come to the conclusion that there is a need to explore the culling of wombats.

A recent FOI that I lodged revealed that draft versions of this draft report actually told a different story from the eventual final recommendations that it contains. Early drafts did not include recommendations to explore options for a controlled native species management plan. An earlier draft stated, “Currently there is not enough information on the abundance or distribution of wombats within the ACT on which to base management decisions.”

While there was a suggested action to fill policy gaps to address wombat management in urban and agricultural areas, there was no explicit mention of a culling program in the concluding recommendations. How we got from that early draft to a final draft technical review that made no reference to developing more evidence-based population estimates in the recommendations section—instead suggesting exploring options for culling—is an interesting question, and quite concerning. The answer to an under-resourced conservation issue is not to jump to culling. It is obviously to find more research and more consultation so we can have the evidence base to make sound

decisions.

I accept that there are draft reviews. However, releasing or using such a review or report for community consultation without the necessary leadership to work with leaseholders and animal welfare advocates will create conflict and backlash that, I think, we have seen in this petition.

The government needs to take an active leadership role in this space. As I have indicated, my strong sense is that leaseholders are willing to have those conversations, as our welfare advocates, to: find scientists who have the knowledge in this area; fund the research that is needed; to develop expertise if it is lacking; and, if there is not enough evidence, actually build the evidence base that will support sound recommendations for dealing with this challenge.

Wombats—bare-nosed wombats—petitions 15-26 and 49-26

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) (10.12): I was not actually planning to speak, but I could not resist. I just wanted to get up and declare my love and support for our native wombats, and also support for Wombat Rescue and all the amazing work you do. Thank you to all the petitioners. I really look forward to strongly advocating to support and protect our wombats in the ACT.

Wombats—bare-nosed wombats—petitions 15-26 and 49-26 Roads—Hindmarsh Drive and Tyagarah Street—petitions 23-26 and 51-26

Ms Berry: Are you going to declare your love too?

MR COCKS (Murrumbidgee) (10.12): Absolutely, I will declare my love for wombats. Indeed, I did sit on an inquiry that considered the impact of development on wombats, last term. It is not the only petition I wish to speak to today, but there are clearly issues here which the government should be taking seriously.

The other issue that I wanted to rise and speak about today is the petition that has been brought by Ms Carrick around the intersection in O'Malley because, of course, this is something that I have been campaigning on and pushing for a number of years now. I am glad that Ms Carrick has discovered this issue, because the problems across O'Malley and Isaacs in terms of traffic congestion and safe intersections as people try to get out of the suburbs are quite significant.

I think it is telling that the government has not been paying attention, when they have been refusing—since around about 2023, as I started pushing on this issue—to even acknowledge and take action on identifying a solution. Because when a government does not identify solutions, will not take the issue seriously, the residents in the area are forced to do so for themselves.

Now, I will note that this particular intersection for O'Malley is tied to the other traffic problems in the area—intersections like the Numeralla Street intersection, the Julia Flynn Avenue intersection. The ability for people to get safely out of these two suburbs

is severely constrained, and there are obvious solutions.

I think, again, that it is about time that the government took it seriously and acted to provide a safe way out of all of these suburbs, for all of the residents there. And this is not the first time that this has been brought up in this Assembly. I just ask that the government finally please take it seriously.

**Wombats—bare-nosed wombats—petitions 15-26 and 49-26
Planning—Griffith—petitions 29-26 and 50-26**

MS LEE (Kurrajong) (10.15): Lest I be left out, I also declare my love of wombats. But in all seriousness, as shadow minister for environment I did have the great pleasure of engaging with this issue, and I thank all the petitioners as well as the stakeholders who reached out to me to express their concern about the government's approach to managing this issue.

In particular, I want to give a shout-out to Yolandi as well, who not only accommodated us with getting a very cuddly cuddle with those very cute wombats but who gave us really good, open-minded insight into what the issues are and, as Mr Emerson pointed out, was very open to working with rural landholders to make sure that we get a good outcome in this space. So, well done to all the petitioners. I mean, that is a massive, massive number of people who clearly have expressed their strong views about what is happening, and it is incumbent on the ACT government to take that on board and make sure that they respond accordingly.

The other petition I wish to address is the one that was driven by the Griffith Narrabundah Community Association which has been signed by over 170 Canberrans in the e-petition and over 1,650 on hard copy, and which came about following months of frustration at this government's lack of meaningful consultation. Local residents feel unheard. They feel overlooked and taken for granted by this government. Let's be clear: this petition is not opposition for the sake of opposition. It is a call for respect; respect for community voices, for genuine consultation and for good planning that reflects the needs and values of the people who live there.

At the heart of this issue is draft major plan amendment six which proposes a health facility on open space behind the Griffith shops. What has troubled residents most is not simply the scale or location of this development, but the process in which it has been undertaken thus far. Residents have told me that they were led to believe that this facility would mirror the walk-in centres across Canberra. Instead, what is being proposed is a limited, appointment-only service operating during standard business hours.

Locals also tell me that this is not what they were told. This is not what they expected and, crucially, they say this is not what they were consulted on.

What we are seeing is a growing frustration with a pattern of decision-making where consultation appears to be an afterthought rather than its foundation. Community members, including my constituents in Kurrajong, have raised valid concerns about the loss of valued green space; the impact on local businesses from constrained parking; and the lack of accessible public transport. These are practical concerns and they are

genuine concerns yet many in my community feel that their voices are not meaningfully heard. Then, to compound this frustration felt by the community, the project has been declared a Territory Priority Project, effectively removing their ability to appeal.

This petition—I say again—is not saying “no” to improved health infrastructure. Far from it. They are asking for something entirely reasonable: for this government to engage in genuine open consultation before decisions are locked in. This is a community that has come up with some very practical potential solutions as well. In fact, I attended the Inner South Canberra Community Council meeting on Monday evening, where this was a bit of a hot topic of discussion. And there has been a lot of work done by the local residents to come up with an alternative plan.

We are not talking about constituents who sit there and say, “Not happy with this,” and then sit back. We are talking about constituents who have genuinely put forward alternative proposals to ensure that some of the concerns that have been raised through this petition are addressed—including accessibility to public transport, including the great footprint that needs to be done, and including the fact that it should be in a place where more people in the inner south can access it.

The government should listen to those concerns because a good government listens. Good planning brings in the community early, not after decisions are effectively made. And good outcomes come when residents are treated not as obstacles, but as genuine partners to improve their community. Thank you.

**Roads—Hindmarsh Drive and Tyagarah Street—petitions 23-26 and 51-26
Planning—Griffith—petitions 29-26 and 50-26
Wombats—bare-nosed wombats—petitions 15-26 and 49-26**

MS CARRICK (Murrumbidgee) (10.19): I rise to speak to the petition calling for traffic lights at the intersection of Tyagarah Street and Hindmarsh Drive in O’Malley. Traffic pulling out onto major roads, going 80 kilometres per hour, is an ongoing issue and it is very dangerous.

Firstly, I would like to congratulate Nada, a local resident and year 12 student who has taken up this cause and is the principal petitioner. It is very pleasing to see a young person identify an important local issue, work out what they can do to raise awareness about it, and then follow through, engaging with their local community.

As Nada has recognised, the Tyagarah Street intersection at Hindmarsh Drive can be dangerous, and there have been regular collisions over many years. As an uncontrolled intersection, vehicles entering and exiting Tyagarah Street are forced to cross multiple lanes of 80-kilometres-per-hour traffic and can face long delays waiting for breaks in the traffic. The limited visibility of westbound traffic coming down the hill on Hindmarsh Drive greatly increases the risk of collision.

Installing traffic lights at this intersection would significantly reduce safety risks, supporting the ACT government’s commitment to Vision Zero; no deaths or serious injuries on our road network. If sequenced with the traffic lights at the adjacent Palmer Street intersection, traffic lights at Tyagarah Street would have minimal impact on westbound traffic flow and no impact on eastbound through-traffic flow.

I again congratulate Nada on initiating and delivering this petition. I hope it will be considered for a future funding round, perhaps for commonwealth Black Spot funding.

I would also like to speak to the inner south health facility. This petition raises a fundamental planning question. A district-level health facility should be located in the district's major hub. In the inner south, that is clearly Manuka or Kingston, not a local shopping precinct and adjoining green space. So, I ask what options analysis was undertaken to determine the site for this facility. Why were established group centres which are designed for higher order services and better served by public transport, not the preferred location?

Instead, we see a proposal to build on valued open green space behind the Griffith shops, removing parkland and altering the character of a local centre. Yet there were credible alternatives. Community facility zoned land at Kingston, including on Giles Street, have already got the appropriate zoning and transport access, and could accommodate the facility without sacrificing green space.

Residents are also rightly concerned that consultation focused on what services should be offered. However, they were expecting a nurse-led walk-in centre. And with the project declared as a Territory Priority Project, appeal rights are removed, limiting community input into a decision of significant local impact.

This is about getting the fundamentals right—the right facility in the right place, supported by clear evidence and genuine consultation.

I would also like to support the ACT government with respect to wombats, to do the work needed with landowners to find solutions that support and manage wombats in our environment without the need for a controlled native species management plan. Thank you.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Housing—housing supply

Ministerial statement

MR BARR (Kurrajong—Chief Minister, Minister for Economic Development and Minister for Tourism and Trade) (10.23): I rise this morning to update the Assembly on the combined housing supply initiatives being delivered across the territory by both the territory and commonwealth governments. This statement this morning builds on previous updates to the Assembly outlining the range of reforms and investments now underway to increase housing supply and improve affordability. The scale and coordination of these initiatives represent a comprehensive, integrated strategy encompassing tax reform, planning reform, land supply, urban renewal, infrastructure investment, and targeted support for both home ownership and social and affordable housing.

Mr Speaker, I think it is important to begin with the demand side of the housing equation. The ACT has experienced sustained population growth over a long period. In the decade prior to the pandemic, growth rates regularly exceeded two per cent per

annum, with some years approaching or exceeding three per cent. This represented one of the fastest sustained growth rates of any jurisdiction in Australia and certainly placed significant pressure on housing supply. In more recent years that growth rate has moderated. Current projections indicate population growth easing to around 1.75 per cent per annum over the forward estimates. This moderation is significant. It does not remove housing demand, but it does provide a stable environment in which housing supply can begin to catch up after a prolonged period of rapid population expansion.

However, population growth in itself is not the sole driver of housing demand. Investor activity, interest rates, income growth, household formation trends and broader economic conditions all play a role in shaping housing outcomes. In particular, investor demand has historically been a major contributor to housing market dynamics. Changes to taxation policy at the commonwealth level are seeking to rebalance this component of demand, encouraging investment in new supply over existing dwellings. The interaction between these drivers underscores why a multifaceted policy response has been necessary to boost supply and to improve affordability.

Mr Speaker, in April 2026, the government secured an agreement with the commonwealth government to unlock approximately 4,900 new homes across Canberra, including more than 1,700 homes dedicated specifically for first home buyers. This agreement includes \$250 million in commonwealth funding to enable critical infrastructure, including upgrades in Kingston, Weston Creek, the Molonglo Valley and Ginninderry. These investments address one of the biggest constraints on housing supply in the territory, and that is infrastructure readiness. Without enabling infrastructure, land cannot be developed and housing cannot be delivered.

Going forward, greenfield land release in the territory will continue to become more expensive and challenging to deliver, and this is why additional support from the commonwealth is beneficial for the ACT's land release program. The commonwealth funding complements a range of other jointly funded programs currently delivering more housing for the ACT. The Housing Australia Future Fund is supporting the delivery of 40,000 social and affordable homes nationally over five years. And progress to date has been substantial, with over 18,600 homes already committed nationwide through the first two funding rounds.

The ACT has secured 894 dwellings through these rounds, demonstrating the tangible benefits of this national program at the local level. A third national funding round is now underway and will deliver a further 21,350 homes nationally, with an emphasis on accelerating delivery and strengthening partnerships. The Housing Australia Future Fund represents a long-term structural investment in housing supply, providing certainty and scale to our social housing sector and supporting the increase in affordable housing opportunities in the territory.

At the local level, the territory government is continuing to invest in new and renewed public housing. As of April this year, the ACT public housing portfolio comprised 11,996 dwellings, with more than 200 set to be added in fiscal year 2026-27. And through the Growing and Renewing Public Housing Program, the government is renewing at least 1,000 homes and adding at least 400 additional dwellings. To date, over 1,070 dwellings have been delivered through this program, including newly constructed homes and strategic acquisitions. And with the support of Housing

Australia Future Fund funding, the ACT will continue to steadily increase our public housing stock between now and 2030.

Mr Speaker, tax reform also plays a critical role in shaping housing outcomes. At the commonwealth level, the 2026-27 federal budget introduces some significant housing tax reforms, including limiting negative gearing to newly built homes and reforming capital gains tax arrangements. These reforms are designed to redirect investor demand towards new housing supply rather than existing properties.

I think it is important to note, because this is often misunderstood, that when investors exit the market, the outcome is typically a transfer of ownership either to another investor or to an owner-occupier. The houses are not demolished when an investor sells; they are sold to someone else, either another investor or an owner-occupier. These dynamics do not necessarily reduce the total supply of housing, but they can certainly affect the tenure patterns and rental availability. Over time, however, aligning investment incentives with new supply should support an overall increase in housing availability, particularly for a cohort of people we all want to help—first home buyers.

And through the ACT's long transition away from stamp duty and towards a broad-based land tax, we have been focused on reducing the up-front costs of purchasing a property for first home buyers. This will continue to be a focus of the ACT's tax reform strategy going forward, given it complements the range of commonwealth government programs enabling more first home buyers to enter the market.

Mr Speaker, recent market data indicates that first home buyers are playing a significant increased role in the ACTs housing market. And as conditions have stabilised and targeted support has increased, the share of first home buyers in transactions has risen to very high levels compared to previous years. This trend reflects both policy support and changing market dynamics, including reduced investor activity and more moderate price growth.

Mr Speaker, it is also important to consider the recent housing market conditions. Data indicates that house price growth in Canberra has moderated significantly compared with earlier periods. Whilst annual growth continues, monthly and quarterly movements have been either flat or very modest in growth. Similarly, rental price growth has also slowed considerably. Recent data shows rental increases of around two to three per cent annually for houses and units, representing increased affordability in Canberra compared to other capital cities. While rents and prices remain elevated though, this moderation is of course an important and welcome development for those seeking to enter the housing market. It suggests that a combined impact of increased supply, moderating population growth and these targeted policy interventions is beginning to influence market outcomes.

On the supply side, the ACT continues to implement planning reforms to enable greater density, to streamline approvals and to increase housing diversity. Land supply programs are being accelerated, with a focus on delivering a range of housing types, including greenfield, infill, and medium-density developments. Urban renewal projects remain central to increasing supply in established areas, ensuring that housing is delivered close to jobs, transport, and services.

And, again, the ACT is planning for urban renewal precincts, and that work is being supported by commonwealth government investment. The Urban Precincts and Partnerships Program provided \$2.8 million in funding to make the Canberra railway station precinct housing-ready, building on the \$3 million in ACT government funding for planning, community engagement and design for this precinct. The territory and commonwealth governments are also collaborating on master plan development for the Bruce Health, Sports and Education Precinct, which will include a housing component. And a key priority for this work is to identify the best housing opportunities in this precinct that can complement current and planned public infrastructure.

Mr Speaker, the government, in partnership with the commonwealth, is delivering a sustained and comprehensive response to housing demand. We seek to increase housing supply, improve affordability, support first home buyers and ensure that growth is inclusive. Challenges remain, particularly in construction capacity and cost pressures, thanks to Donald Trump's war. The evidence now emerging on population growth, price moderation and rental stabilisation suggests that these combined initiatives are beginning to have an impact though. This is a long-term effort, requiring continued collaboration and careful policy coordination.

I present the following paper:

Housing supply—Ministerial statement, 27 May 2026.

I move:

That the Assembly take note of the paper.

MS CLAY (Ginninderra) (10.33): I want to thank the Chief Minister for bringing this important matter before the Assembly, and I want to note the investment by the commonwealth through the Housing Australia Future Fund, which has been complemented by the territory's affordable housing fund. It has facilitated a significant investment in community housing in the ACT. I look forward to hearing the results of HAFF round 3 outcomes, and hopefully there will be more opportunities for Canberra there.

The Greens support the government's investment in public housing through renewing the existing portfolio and adding new dwellings. This is supposed to lead to the public housing portfolio growing to 13,200 by 2030. But as we have seen from the public housing waitlist, the number of people on that waitlist continues to grow while the size of the portfolio is also growing. That shows me we are not keeping up with meeting the demand for housing for some of the most vulnerable people here in Canberra, including those with a disability—the people we heard from recently during the inquiry into specialist disability accommodation.

And while this level of investment by the commonwealth and the territory is great, it needs to be sustained. So I am looking forward to both the commonwealth and territory commitments to continuing HAFF and the territory's affordable housing fund. We did ask about this recently: "What comes next?" And the answer was: "We are just doing this for now." Hopefully there is a long-term plan that goes with that and we get a different answer soon. I would encourage the Chief Minister and minister for housing

to support the next iteration of HAFF when talking to their federal colleagues, and to ask, “What comes next?”

As the government often remarks when talking about land supply, the private sector also plays an important role in delivering housing. In the release of greenfield land and redevelopment of territory land, the government has set targets for public, community and affordable housing, and the Assembly has heard about how these targets can prove to be elusive. We also need to look at how we can increase the supply of public and community housing when privately owned sites are redeveloped.

I have started a conversation with the community about zoning for inclusion, which aims to capture some of the value of that land which is generated when blocks are redeveloped for residential or commercial purposes. That value should be put directly back into public and community housing. It is a scheme that has been operating in other jurisdictions, and over time it delivers housing for people who are on low incomes.

Funding for inclusionary zoning should not replace the direct commitment of government to increase the supply of public and community housing. As the Chief Minister said today on the question of land supply, it is important to come at it from many angles. We were also pleased to see that there have been some movements at the federal level on negative gearing and capital gains tax concessions. We are still waiting to see the details and see how far these will go, but it is good to see some movement in this.

MRS MORRIS (Brindabella) (10.35): I thank the Chief Minister for his statement this morning. There is no doubt that housing supply and affordability is one of the defining challenges facing Canberrans now and into the future. Sadly, for too many Canberrans, the hope of home ownership is dying. Home ownership is more than just a financial transaction: it is a social, economic and moral imperative. A home gives people stability. It gives families security. It gives children roots in a community. And it gives older Canberrans the dignity and protection that comes from entering retirement with a place of their own.

And that is why it is so concerning that so many young Canberrans now look to the housing market and see home ownership as something that is out of reach for them. Many are saving; they are working hard, investing and doing everything right. And yet home ownership still feels impossible, and they still feel that they may need to leave Canberra if they ever want to buy a home of their own.

And the Chief Minister points to moderation in prices and rents, but moderation after years of severe pressure is not the same thing as affordability. The government’s own rental data shows the average weekly rent has risen from \$425 to \$751 over 10 years. That is not a minor movement. It is a decade-long squeeze on Canberra renters. The slower increase now does not help a young person who has already given up on buying or a family who are struggling to keep up with rent.

Mr Speaker, this government has committed to 30,000 additional homes by 2030, and the basic delivery data needed to judge whether the government is on track is conspicuously absent from the Chief Minister’s statement today. Approvals, commencements and completions matter because they show whether the pipeline is real

or whether today's announcement will become tomorrow's excuses. And on the data, we know the government is well behind.

The statement also acknowledges that infrastructure readiness is one of the biggest constraints on housing supply, and that is welcome honesty from the government today. But it also raises the obvious question: why has the government allowed those constraints to build up over so many years and contribute to the housing prices that we are experiencing today? The government must stop treating housing supply as a communications exercise and start treating it as a delivery crisis that has very far-reaching social and economic consequences.

Canberra needs more homes of all types: townhouses, medium density homes and attached homes, where families can put down roots. We need infill, but we also, very importantly, need greenfield. We need renewal, but we also need real choice, and we absolutely need better affordability. Mr Speaker, the test is whether a young couple, a growing family or a first home buyer can actually build a future here in Canberra, and on that test, there is still a very long way to go.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Public schools—ACT Public School System Resourcing Review

Ministerial statement

MS BERRY (Ginninderra—Deputy Chief Minister, Minister for Education and Early Childhood, Minister for Homes, Homelessness and New Suburbs and Minister for Sport and Recreation) (10.40): I rise today to table the final report of the expert panel for the *ACT public school system resourcing review*. I also table the government's response, *Future of education: one public education system*—a reform that marks an important next chapter for public education in the ACT. Public education is one of the strongest levers for social change that exists in our community. Through this important reform, we will join up public schools to deliver one consistent, coordinated system for public education. It is how we create opportunity, strengthen fairness, level the playing field and ensure that every child—no matter their background—can build a good life.

Our public schools achieve incredible things but only when they are supported and have all the tools. Last year I commissioned an independent expert panel to review public school system resourcing, in response to both acute budget pressure and to changes we have seen in the community over the past decades. What the expert panel found is that there are real funding pressures facing public schools and the public school system.

This will not be news to our community. Student complexity is increasing. Teachers are calling out for more support. Not every school has equitable resourcing to support student needs. As the expert panel's report outlines, there are four interrelated cost drivers that are placing sustained pressure on school budgets and the overall system. I will read from the report here:

... increasing complexity in students' learning and support needs is driving greater spending on additional in-class assistance, specialist out-of-class input and targeted supports beyond what is provided through core teaching.

Second, workforce pressures are compounding costs through changing leave patterns, inequitable distribution of staff between schools and rapid growth in Learning Support Assistant roles as a default response to complexity.

Third, ageing infrastructure and rising expectations for inclusive, fit-for-purpose school facilities are increasing maintenance and renewal costs, while school responsibilities for asset management are contributing to inefficiency and uneven quality of facilities across the system.

And finally:

... schools face increasing cost pressures due to minimum staffing and compliance requirements. In small primary schools and those with offsite preschools, these pressures are particularly acute as costs typically do not scale down with enrolments, leading to more systemic budget pressures compared to larger primary schools, high schools and colleges.

The expert panel concluded that meaningful change requires a generational shift to operate as one public education system. Historically, the ACT has had an autonomous, school-by-school approach. But with the reality our schools are now facing, we need to move to a new chapter of public education. The expert panel also recommended a range of commonsense improvements to our business systems, approaches to supporting students and funding methodologies. These changes will be further strengthened by a coordinated, system-wide approach.

In developing their report, the expert panel consulted widely. I want to thank the teachers, school leaders, school administration and support staff, unions, community and professional representatives, and members of the public who participated in this review. I heard your voices throughout the report. I encourage members of this Assembly and the public to read the report of the expert panel. I found it honest, at times confronting and ultimately galvanising.

The report shows the context of education in the ACT has changed since our system was established in the 1970s. We now educate around 50,000 students across 93 public schools. Student demographics and needs have changed over time. I found it difficult, but important, to have read parts of the report about students missing out on supports they need. This is not okay. Without a consistent approach and the ability to coordinate resourcing fairly across the system, we cannot offer fully equitable access to education.

Another issue the report highlights is that, despite high government investment, our student outcomes are not as strong as we would like or that students deserve. Consistency across our system, grounded in evidence, will mean every child can achieve their full potential and the opportunities it unlocks.

The report also tells us there are functions being delivered school-by-school, but which could be done more effectively centrally. Schools will be freed up to focus on students and their families, not on duplicative administration or compliance tasks that can be done once for everyone's benefit.

Of the 25 recommendations in the report, the government has agreed to 18. The other

seven are agreed in principle, where more detailed review or industrial consultation is needed to deliver the intent responsibly.

Implementing these recommendations represents the biggest generational shift ever for ACT public education. ACT public education will become one consistent, coordinated system to strengthen equity, student outcomes and financial sustainability. I want to reassure everyone that despite the system reform, each one of our schools will still have their own heartbeat, their own culture, their own vibe. But we will do more things consistently and centrally so that schools can focus their time and energy on what matters most: teaching and learning; student wellbeing; and supporting every learner to achieve their full potential.

Additionally, there will be other commonsense improvements to how public schools, funding models and business processes operate. Making this shift will take time, and it will not always be easy. It requires a phased approach, with careful consideration and communication. That is why the government is backing this reform with an initial investment of \$9.326 million to strengthen central approaches and enable better supports to schools.

This will include increased human resources capacity, better support for principals, and work to modernise systems and improve infrastructure asset planning. Funding requirements will be reviewed over the coming years to ensure investment is targeted effectively as the reforms evolve. These reforms will not stand still and will continue to evolve, with modern approaches and expertise guiding us there.

I want to conclude by emphasising that this is a deliberate shift in how public education operates in the ACT: 93 public schools, one public education system. By moving to a more coordinated system, this is more consistent and equitable in responding to each individual student's need so that every child—no matter their background, no matter their school—can access an excellent public education. The future of education in the ACT is one public education system, and the government is proud to be building on that future.

I present the following papers:

Supporting the delivery of an effective and equitable public education system in the ACT—Final Report of the Expert Panel, dated 2 April 2026.

Interim Government response—Future of Education: One public education system, undated.

I move:

That the Assembly take note of the ministerial statement.

MS LEE (Kurrajong) (10.48): I rise to take note of the ministerial statement by the minister for education on the ACT Public School System Resourcing Review. This review is confronting, but not for the reason that the minister suggests. It is confronting because it exposes a government that stopped listening, a government that was in denial, a government that decided long ago that it had all the answers. It exposes a minister who, for years, ignored the warning signs, ignored advice from experts, ignored anyone

who did not swallow the spin that she was pushing out, and dismissed the concerns of the very people that it was meant to support.

For years, teachers told this minister that the system was under strain. For years, principals told this minister that workloads were unsustainable. For years, experts told this minister and pointed to declining outcomes and inequities. What did this minister do? She dismissed them. She buried her head in the sand, listened only to those who told her what she wanted to hear and, to make matters worse, criticised the Canberra Liberals when we tried to get action in this space.

Now, she comes into this chamber, congratulating herself on commissioning this review—a review that she was forced to commission when it was revealed that 77 out of the then 92 of our ACT government schools were over-budget. The minister stood in this place and said that this review found increasing student complexity, teachers calling for support and inequitable resourcing across schools.

Let us be absolutely clear: none of this is new. The only difference now is that this minister can no longer deny it. She can no longer stand here, as she has done many times over the years, and say that everything is fine—in fact, that everything is more than fine, that she was leading an education system that was nation-leading. This was hopelessly ignorant at best, and dangerously and wilfully enabling at worst.

The minister told us time and time again that the system was high performing. She told us outcomes were strong. Time and time again, the minister deflected any attempt the Canberra Liberals made to call for changes by accusing us of talking down our schools. But now, even the minister concedes that outcomes are, in her words, “not as strong as we would like or that students deserve”. In her own statement she says:

Another issue the report highlights is that despite high government investment, our student outcomes are not as strong as we would like or that students deserve.

This is not just a change in tone. This is a damning admission, a damning indictment that the government got it wrong, that this minister got it wrong, and it is our students that have paid the price.

This review lays bare a system weighed down by bureaucracy, riddled with duplication, placing impossible pressure on staff and schools. It reveals a widening disconnect between schools and the central office, with stakeholders describing a growing us-versus-them culture, and reforms frequently introduced without adequate resourcing, consultation or coordination. It describes students—some of the most vulnerable students—missing out on the support that they desperately need. And all the while, this minister stood by, over the years, time and time again, and claimed everything was more than okay—that everything was rosy.

The minister now talks about a generational shift. What we are really looking at is a generational failure of leadership, because this did not happen overnight. This is the result of years of ignoring advice, dismissing concerns and refusing—not just failing, refusing—to act, until the situation became so unsustainable that schools were blowing their budgets and the minister had no choice but to commission this review.

ACT Parents have come out overnight, and their position is very clear. They say that this review—and I quote:

... has validated what parents, educators and school leaders have been living for years: the ACT public school system is not resourced to consistently deliver the quality, equitable education experience our community expects ...

Parents and carers have been raising the same problems for years: disrupted learning, inconsistent or non-existent supports, and inequitable access to opportunities depending on your postcode.

Further, they state:

Our teachers, school staff and principals have been carrying this system with relentless professionalism and care ... even when the system around them isn't fit for purpose.

Just this morning, the president of the Australian Education Union ACT, Angela Burroughs, was on radio, and said, “Absolutely damning.” The direct quote from Angela Burroughs is that this report is “absolutely damning”. Let us not forget that, for years, over consecutive terms, the Canberra Liberals also raised the same concerns, publicly and in this place, a number of times. We spoke about the relentless growth in administrative burden on our teachers, the inequity between our schools and the gap between hollow, empty promises and classroom reality.

We have put forward clear, practical solutions, over the years and over multiple terms and, most recently, at the 2024 ACT election. And what happened? We were dismissed by this minister. We were told we were wrong. We were told the system was performing strongly. We were criticised by this minister, and we were blamed for, as she says, “talking down our schools”.

This review proves just how wrong this minister has been for years. It proves that teachers were right. It proves that parents were right. It proves that school leaders were right. And it proves that anyone who raised concern over the years, including the Canberra Liberals, was right. The only people who got it wrong were this minister and this Labor government.

Now, after years of denial, this minister comes into this place with a reform agenda. She does not just bring a reform agenda; she takes credit—formally takes credit—for the reform agenda and asks all of us and the community to trust that she will fix it. But why should anyone trust this government, which refused for years to even acknowledge that there was a problem in the first place?

Reform is necessary. Reform is long overdue. But reform without accountability is not enough, because unless this government and this minister own their failures, unless they acknowledge that they ignored the voices of teachers, educators, experts, parents and anyone who raised concern about what she was doing, nothing will change.

This review is not just a road map. It is a verdict—a verdict on a minister who dismissed the evidence, a verdict on a government that stopped listening, a verdict on years of inaction while pressures built around our schools.

The Canberra Liberals will not let this be forgotten. We will always stand with teachers, we will always stand with parents, and we will always stand with students. This minister must be held accountable for ignoring the warning signs for years, for dismissing the evidence, and for failing a whole generation of Canberra students, teachers and families.

MISS NUTTALL(Brindabella) (10.57): I thank the minister for her statement. First and foremost, I would like to welcome the work of this review, those who were consulted and contributed to its findings, and the minister for her response and expressed commitment to implementing 18 out of the 25 of its recommendations, plus in-principle support for the remainder. It is essential. It is moving in the right direction and, quite frankly, it is overdue.

I would also like to thank the teachers, the teacher librarians, the school assistants, school psychologists, career advisers, principals, business managers—all the school-based staff. I would like to thank parents, families and, most of all, students. These are the people who, for a long time, have been telling us much of what this review has reported.

To the tireless AEU, whose advocacy for education workers and the students they support brought about this review, report and constructive government response, I say thank you. In their calls for this review of our ACT public school system, the AEU told us again and again why it needed to happen and what the government needed to change. They told us classes were being split, collapsed and cancelled. And when they asked us to get the data on that because the government would not give it to them, we discovered that it was because the government does not collect that data. So yes, this review was not just needed; it was the only way forward, and it was long overdue.

We have known for a while that school-based autonomy has not been working. So much work gets duplicated. School-based autonomy was based on the quite laudable idea that schools know their communities best—and this, of course, is true. But in practice, we saw that it was a hands-off approach where school-based staff could not help but feel that the Education Directorate had abrogated responsibility and was satisfied with schools taking on the lion's share of admin and compliance.

The report reflected what teachers have been saying about unbearable workloads—that they are a downstream impact of our education system not working in the way that it needs to. We often think of workload as a driver of challenges in a system, but this report vindicates the professionals at its centre by saying, “Of course, you’re struggling with unbearable workloads; the system has not been set up to work for you.”

With respect to infrastructure, I know this one has been evident for a while. Between Mr Werner-Gibbings and I knocking down their door on ageing infrastructure in Tuggeranong, Ms Clay over in Belco, and Mr Rattenbury—I miss him—Ms Lee and Mr Emerson following suit in the inner north, we have all recognised the challenges of ageing infrastructure, because we or our kids grew up in them.

It surprises me that after two inquiries into school infrastructure in the last term of the Assembly, we still have not seen finalised property quality standards, the public release of the school infrastructure audit, or a long-term plan for asset renewal. Kids, blankets,

feeling faint in the heat because there is no working air con: we have heard it so many times in the chamber already.

As the minister reflected, this report includes confronting evidence of students with a disability not getting adequate support in schools, with the report's finding being:

The existing funding envelope in the ACT for supporting students with a disability is not sufficient to meet all children's needs.

This is what we have been saying in this place about these children for such a long time. It is what stakeholders have been saying to us, and what parents have been writing to us about—and I know ACT Parents have been great vocal advocates here.

I imagine it might feel equal parts vindicating and frustrating, in reading this report. I know the minister has said she has introduced things along the way to address these holes in the inclusivity of our education system, but it is pretty disappointing that it has taken us getting to this point—breaking point—for the government to consider comprehensive reform.

I am also starting to appreciate how frustrating it might be for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students that little more than a tenth of the loading that they and their schools are entitled to from the school resourcing standard is going directly to their school to support them. I know there are some great shared programs. I do not think we should do away with those for a second. But the report also tells us that what they heard from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and their communities is that they are not seeing the full benefits of their funding and that they continue to experience barriers to learning and racism within our public school system.

I am glad this report has confirmed the flaws in our current system in terms which compel the government to act. Today, I join thousands of territory teachers, educators, school assistants, principals and parents who have received these findings with little surprise. I empathise with our teachers and all our school-based staff, who are undoubtedly feeling a mix of feelings today—frustration, exasperation, validation, vindication—all undoubtedly mixed in with pure exhaustion from working conditions which this report has confirmed are unbearable. They knew, for the entire time. I stand in support of their industrial action and for a system that works for them.

Ultimately, today, I want to join the community in looking forward to the changes to come for our education system in the ACT. I welcome the work which is to come and our investment in schools, because it cannot wait. All the proposed recommendations will not work unless they are properly resourced, and that resourcing must actually go to classrooms, the teachers and the learning support assistants running them, and the students who learn and grow in them.

The ACT Greens will work with the government to make this reform of our public schools the best it can be for children, teachers and school staff, and families in the ACT. We will continue to stand with educators and families, and ensure that these reforms are fully funded and implemented with good faith and strong leadership.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Voluntary assisted dying—implementation—update

Ministerial statement

MS STEPHEN-SMITH (Kurrajong—Minister for Health, Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Finance and Minister for the Public Service) (11.03): I am pleased to rise today to provide a further update to the Assembly on the operation of the ACT's voluntary assisted dying scheme, which is now at the six-month mark of operation. Everyone who has been involved should be proud of the work undertaken to establish and oversee the scheme to date.

Reflecting the substantial work that went into designing the scheme and legislation, the ACT has a clinically robust and well-governed voluntary assisted dying framework, supported by strong clinical engagement, appropriate safeguards and effective oversight by the Voluntary Assisted Dying Oversight Board.

We have seen doctors, nurses and nurse practitioners undertaking training and becoming voluntary assisted dying practitioners. This workforce is committed, capable and delivering safe, high-quality care. Supported through ongoing training and robust clinical stewardship, the service remains reliable and responsive to the needs of the community. As community awareness grows and demand for voluntary assisted dying services increases, the workforce remains well positioned to meet the needs of people seeking access to the scheme.

Importantly, we have so far seen the scheme operating as intended, and the Voluntary Assisted Dying Oversight Board continues to monitor implementation. Since the commencement of the scheme in November last year, 165 people have registered their interest in exploring voluntary assisted dying with the Care Navigator Service. At this stage, 128 people have made a formal first request and 104 people have completed the assessment process and been found eligible to access voluntary assisted dying.

To date, 39 people have exercised their right to this legal end-of-life choice. There has continued to be a strong preference for practitioner administration. Thirty-six people chose to have the substance administered by an authorised practitioner, and three chose to self-administer the substance. Of the total number of people who have registered their interest, 52 per cent are male and 48 per cent are female. The median age of applicants is 75½ years, and 41 per cent of applicants are 80 years of age or older.

Of this cohort, there were three common categories of condition listed as the primary diagnosis. Cancer accounted for 52 per cent of all primary conditions, followed by neurological disorders at 19 per cent and respiratory at 10 per cent, with the balance of requests relating to a range of other conditions. The length of time between a person's first request to the administration of the substance has always been led by the patient's preferences. Timeframes have ranged from three days to 120 days.

I am pleased to advise that our voluntary assisted dying workforce has continued to grow. To date, 43 practitioners have completed the mandatory training and are authorised to perform voluntary assisted dying functions, an increase from 39 practitioners at my last update in February 2026. Of those, 23 practitioners are authorised to perform all roles, enabling them to conduct assessments and administer

an approved voluntary assisted dying substance. Eighteen are medical practitioners, and five are nurse practitioners. This demonstrates the positive impact of effectively utilising the highly skilled nurse practitioner workforce to support voluntary assisted dying. The workforce also includes 20 registered nurses authorised for the role of administering practitioner.

We are incredibly grateful to every clinician who has become an authorised voluntary assisted dying practitioner. I hear from these professionals how privileged they feel to be able to support Canberrans to exercise a choice that reflects their values and their wishes at the end of their lives. But there is no doubt that it is a space of complexity and deep emotion for individuals and families.

I am pleased to be able to update the Assembly on further work to progress reforms to the ACT's scheme. The 2026-27 budget will fund work on reforms to allow access to voluntary assisted dying for people who lose decision-making capacity after the final assessment stage of the voluntary assisted dying process.

Members will be aware that the current scheme was developed following extensive consultation and engagement with the community, clinicians, advocacy organisations and experts. Throughout the development of the legislation, and since it has come into effect, complex issues relating to access to voluntary assisted dying and capacity continue to be raised by stakeholders, clinicians, members in this place, and the broader community.

I recognise that much of this commentary relates to the question of access for people with dementia, who are likely to lose decision-making capacity before—in the language of the act—their condition could be considered “advanced”. For a detailed analysis of just how complex this matter is, I recommend the discussion paper commissioned by Go Gentle, “A wicked problem: the complexity of dementia and voluntary assisted dying”, which was released in early 2025. This matter will be considered in the review of voluntary assisted dying implementation three years after its commencement.

There is another specific circumstance that was debated in this place during the passage of the legislation, and on which ACT Labor committed to undertaking further work this term. This relates to circumstances where a person has progressed through the existing voluntary assisted dying process; that is, has been assessed as eligible and gone through each stage of the process up to final request and assessment, and then loses decision-making capacity prior to administration of the substance.

In response to the Assembly's resolution on this in June 2024, I tabled a detailed report in May 2025 summarising the significant research and consultation undertaken in relation to this issue. At that time, I indicated that it would be critical to maintain community trust in our strong and safe voluntary assisted dying model when considering any future reforms. To achieve this, I indicated that we would consider a community consultation and co-design process to develop a pathway forward for a potential ACT model for access to voluntary assisted dying for people who lose capacity towards the very end of the process.

Through the 2026-27 budget, the government will fund a citizens' jury process to place the community at the centre of the conversation about access to voluntary assisted dying

for people who lose capacity after progressing through the final request and assessment stages of the process. There are strongly held views across the community on these matters, and understandably so. Using a citizens' jury to explore this issue will bring everyday Canberrans together to consider what type of reform is right for our community.

The issues to be considered are sensitive and deeply personal. They involve balancing individual autonomy, safeguards, legal considerations, clinical practice and community expectations. Unlike a standard consultation process, a citizens' jury brings together a broadly representative group of community members and supports them to engage with evidence, hear from experts and stakeholders, ask questions, and deliberate over time before reaching conclusions.

Importantly, different scenarios can be presented and worked through in detail to determine whether there is an appropriate model for the ACT to enable substitute decision-making in these specific circumstances and, if so, the form it should take. The government expects the citizens' jury process will provide valuable insight into community views, expectations and areas of consensus or disagreement, and help to inform future policy and legislative considerations in this area.

Meaningful consultation takes time, as will careful consideration of any future legislative reform from this work. It is anticipated that the citizens' jury process will be ongoing through the course of 2027. The government will then carefully consider the recommendations from the citizens' jury.

I am pleased to have reached this point and to be making this announcement today, and I look forward to continuing to update the Assembly as the work progresses.

I present the following paper:

Voluntary Assisted Dying—Update—Ministerial statement, 27 May 2026.

I move:

That the Assembly take note of the paper.

MR BRADDOCK (Yerrabi) (11.12): I welcome the minister's update and thank her for providing it this morning. I am glad that more Canberrans have been able to find peace and an end to their intolerable suffering through voluntary assisted dying.

It is good to hear the updates in terms of the level of the workforce that is now supporting Canberrans in accessing voluntary assisted dying and the pathways with which they are able to do so. I ask the minister, as part of the 12-month update on voluntary assisted dying, to provide more information specifically on those who have made a formal request for VAD and this was not approved. There may be multiple reasons for this to occur—the applicant may have passed away whilst going through the application process, or perhaps they were found to be ineligible, which I am particularly interested in.

I also welcome the citizens' jury that has been announced today as a constructive step

forward on the question of what to do with those who lose capacity as they go through the process. I do, however, echo the concerns of Dying with Dignity ACT that the scope of the citizens' jury is too narrow, in that it constrains the question to those who have applied for and have been approved for VAD, but subsequently lose capacity.

This cohort is critical, and it will provide great relief and peace for those who have just been diagnosed with dementia. It is, however, a small cohort. Dying with Dignity ACT estimate that only five ACT residents per year are likely to benefit from such a change, should it take place. I quote Sam Delaney, President of Dying with Dignity ACT:

Canberrans are undoubtedly concerned about the people who have been assessed as eligible for voluntary assisted dying losing decision-making capacity, but they are also concerned about the people who lose decision-making capacity in other circumstances being able to access voluntary assisted dying—those who are only partway through the VAD process, people who have had a stroke or other major health event or accident.

It must be remembered that there is significant community support for voluntary assisted dying to be accessible through advance healthcare directives or similar instruments. A YouGov poll found 77 per cent of the community are in favour of being able to access VAD through advance healthcare directives.

I totally agree with the minister that the question of VAD for dementia patients is a wicked and complex problem with many ethical challenges, but I do not believe we can avoid our responsibilities here in the Assembly because of this.

Firstly, it is because we are talking about a very vulnerable group who are, by definition, intolerably suffering but who are caught in the legislative catch-22 crafted by us right here in the Legislative Assembly. I support moving ahead to grant access to VAD to a significant proportion of the community, but we cannot abdicate our responsibility in order to come back and address this cohort. Secondly, the community strongly supports progress being made on this issue and expects us to do hard things. Thirdly, time—as always—is a factor. Every day that we take to resolve this question is another day when vulnerable Canberrans are intolerably suffering.

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) (11.15): I warmly welcome the statement by the Minister for Health this morning. I think the numbers paint an extraordinary picture. Behind those numbers is a workforce, a service and a body of practice that did not exist a year or even six months ago. Having regard to the doctors, the nurse practitioners, the nurses and all the clinical support around them, everyone doing this work is doing something hard—hard in the sense of sitting with a person at the end of their life, being asked by them to help, and saying, “Yes.”

I want to acknowledge Dr Kerrie Aust, in particular. Over the past two years, she has been one of the most thoughtful and consistent public voices on voluntary assisted dying, not just in the ACT but in this country. As the immediate past president of the AMA in the ACT, as an advocate and as a practitioner, she has explained the law, explained the work and reminded everyone in earshot that within every one of these decisions is a patient who is a human being and a clinician who is a human being. It is

about the gift and the weight of giving someone who is terminally ill, who has had so many choices eroded because of it, a sense of agency—a gift and a weight.

I am so heartened to hear that the clinical body of practice is being developed in the way that clinicians are working together, sharing information and supporting each other. It is remarkable. I am not surprised, but I am so deeply heartened.

I also want to acknowledge that, behind the figure of 39 Canberrans who have accessed voluntary assisted dying, there are 39 families. Behind the figure of 104 people found eligible, there are people who have made it through one of the most rigorous regulatory processes in our system, at one of the most difficult moments of their lives. Some of them, having been found eligible, decided not to proceed, or others have died before they could. Some certainly may have died part-way through the assessment process. Every single one of them has shown a kind of courage that I think we should name.

To make a request under this law, a person has to sit down with their doctor, with their family, with themselves and say out loud what is happening to them and what they want to happen to them. They have to say it in formal terms in documents, in conversations witnessed and recorded, and they have to do all of this while they are dying. The families standing beside them have to find ways to be present, to be supportive and to be honest, often while grieving in advance. We honour the courage of those decisions that are being taken.

During the passage of this legislation in June 2024, this place resolved that further work needed to be done on a specific scenario, where a person has progressed all the way through the assessment process, been found eligible and then loses decision-making capacity before they are able to administer the substance or have it administered to them. Effectively, having done everything that the legislation asks of them, the law has said yes and then, at the very last step, the door closes. It is a circumstance that causes real distress. It is real. It is happening, and it is a circumstance that the community has told us needs a solution. But it is also a circumstance that no other Australian jurisdiction has resolved. The minister has, pleasingly, announced that this budget will fund a citizens' jury to consider exactly this question.

I want to be very clear about why this is the right choice. This is a decision about life and death made on behalf of someone who can no longer speak for themselves. There is no version of this reform that can be designed in my head or in anybody else's and dropped into the Assembly. This is substitute decision-making and, in this context, it has to carry social licence. It has to be safe, and it has to be something that our clinicians can deliver and be comfortable working in and with, be confident in, and it needs to be one that families can trust. A citizens' jury supported by clinicians, legal experts and people with lived experience is how you build a reform that holds. I have already had people contacting me this morning asking how they can be on that jury, and that is terrific to see.

While the ACT is proudly taking another reform step, the federal parliament has still not acted on telehealth and voluntary assisted dying. Voluntary assisted dying care through telehealth remains a crime under the Criminal Code. It is a national issue. And worse, it has come to my attention that some—some who have platforms—are dismissing voluntary assisted dying care and telehealth by describing it as “dial-a-

death”. That phrase is unworthy of the dying Australians that it caricatures. It is unworthy of the doctors, the nurses and the nurse practitioners that I have been describing. And it is unworthy of the parliaments—every state, the ACT and, soon, the Northern Territory—that have legislated this lawful, regulated end-of-life choice after years of deliberation, consultation and conscience.

Let us be precise about what telehealth actually is. It is not a hotline. It is not a transaction. It is a registered practitioner—trained, authorised and, ideally, known to the patient—conducting a consultation by video instead of in person because the patient is too sick to travel, lives too far away or is in their final days. Every safeguard in the act still applies. Eligibility assessment, two independent practitioners, final request: none of that is removed by telehealth. The only thing it removes is the requirement that a dying person physically transport themselves to a clinic, or that a clinician has to travel an enormous distance to provide access to care that the law has already said that they are entitled to.

It is denied to them not because of any clinical concern, not because of any safeguard, not because of any considered policy position, but because of a provision in the commonwealth Criminal Code that pre-dates voluntary assisted dying in this country and was never intended to apply to it. “Dial-a-death” is not an argument; it is a phrase designed to make the people who use this service sound trivial, and the politicians who are refusing to fix the law sound principled.

Let us be clear that the people affected by the commonwealth inaction are dying. They are running out of time, and they are being asked to have their health care be face-to-face to satisfy a federal restriction that has no clinical, ethical or legal foundation, and that federal parliament could lift with a single amendment. We will keep pressing because, every week that this restriction remains in place, Canberrans and Australians are dying without the choice that the law has otherwise already given them.

The announcement today from this government is a measure of how seriously we take the work of getting voluntary assisted dying right—not just legislating it, but living with it, listening to the community, and improving it. I commend the minister’s statement to this chamber.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Thriving Kids foundational support program—update Ministerial statement

MS ORR (Yerrabi—Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, Minister for Climate Change, Environment, Energy and Water, Minister for Disability, Carers and Community Services and Minister for Seniors and Veterans) (11.25): I rise today to provide the Assembly with an update on foundational supports and Thriving Kids as per the calls-on of the Assembly resolution of 24 September 2025, which requires biannual reporting on: (1) projected costings and impacts on current and forward budgets; (2) progress against planning milestones, consultation commitments and outcome targets; (3) government decisions and policy directions arising from the planning process; (4) evidence of safeguards—such as research, quality assurance and evaluation mechanisms—demonstrating that reforms are achieving the intended

improvements and avoiding unintended harm; and (5) details of the assessment criteria and what supports will be provided.

The ACT government continues its commitment to design and implement foundational supports outside the National Disability Insurance Scheme to address current gaps and to ensure people with disability receive the right support at the right time through an ecosystem of supports. As advised previously, the demand for foundational supports emerged from the NDIS review findings which noted the need to address challenges for families and gaps in services to ensure children's developmental concerns are identified and addressed early.

Thriving Kids responds to the specific cohort of children aged 0 to 8 years with low to moderate supports needs and represents an important first step in meeting this shared commitment to foundational supports. As previously advised in the Assembly, I will provide biannual updates on the implementation of foundational supports, including Thriving Kids, in accordance with the Assembly resolution of 24 September 2025. The update today is the first of these biannual updates and the next will be in December 2026.

In addition, I have and will continue to provide updates on the NDIS and the reforms separate to the biannual updates. I note that in February 2026 I delivered an update in response to the Prime Minister's national cabinet announcement on 30 January 2026 which confirmed a landmark national agreement to secure the future of the NDIS and strengthen the system of foundational supports operating alongside the scheme. Further, in May 2026, during the first sitting week of the month, I delivered another update in response to the federal Minister for Disability and the National Disability Insurance Scheme's Press Club address.

With regard to the calls-on of the 24 September 2025 motion, I provide the following. Regarding committed funding to foundational supports, including Thriving Kids, national cabinet agreed to a \$4 billion funding agreement over five years for Thriving Kids. Under the agreement, the \$4 billion funding is to be split 50-50 between the commonwealth and state and territory governments. This means that, of the \$4 billion, \$2 billion is contributed by the commonwealth and \$2 billion is contributed by the states and territories.

The commonwealth has announced it will be providing \$1.4 billion of its contribution to the states and territories to provide local services. The \$1.4 billion will combine with the \$2 billion that the states and territories are contributing, for a total of \$3.4 billion in funding towards local supports administered by states and territories. The remainder of the commonwealth contribution, \$0.6 billion, will be put towards nationally-available supports administered by the commonwealth.

The ACT portion of the \$3.4 billion for local supports delivered by states and territories is approximately \$60 million across five years. In the 2024-25 budget, the ACT government provisioned \$90 million to meet its matched funding obligations for the delivery of all foundational supports. The provision is currently held in the budget's central provision and the provision funding will be drawn down to fund the ACT's 50-50 contribution to Thriving Kids following settlement of intergovernmental agreements and service design. As the funds have been provisioned since the financial year 2024-

25, there is no change to the impacts to the current or forward budgets.

Regarding progress against milestones, consultations and targets, on 25 February 2026, the ACT government signed the Thriving Kids bilateral agreement with the commonwealth which sits under the National Agreement on Foundational Supports. The bilateral agreement requires the ACT to meet early milestones, including publication of material outlining the approach to finalising Thriving Kids service design and planned community engagement ahead of submission of the ACT implementation plan.

In response, the ACT government has committed to a three-phase community engagement approach. Phase 1 involved roundtables to inform early service design. Phase 2 will include targeted consultation on specific service components, including those delivered by community organisations and workforce planning, and will occur over the 18-month implementation period until 31 December 2027. Phase 3 will be ongoing and will involve engagement to support continuous improvement and maintain regular input from families, carers and key community stakeholders as the service system matures and is better integrated over time. This consultation approach also provides a commitment that the government consult with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community, and my directorate is actively working to develop an approach to this critical engagement.

On 31 March 2026, the ACT government released a public Thriving Kids factsheet, outlining the program's purpose, target cohort, proposed service components, staged rollout approach and planned community engagement aligned to key implementation milestones. The factsheet supported early discussions while recognising that detailed eligibility and implementation arrangements are still being finalised. The ACT Thriving Kids factsheet is available on the ACT government website, including an easy-read version.

Together with the ministerial statement issued in February 2026 and ongoing updates to the website, these resources ensure that clear, practical and up-to-date information about Thriving Kids is publicly available and responsive to community needs. Publication of these materials meets the first milestone under the Thriving Kids bilateral agreement: to make a public statement outlining how the ACT government and the commonwealth will work together to finalise Thriving Kids service design and engage with the community ahead of finalising the implementation plan.

In addition to releasing the factsheet, also on 31 March 2026 and as part of phase 1 consultation I held two community roundtables with approximately 25 stakeholders, each including service providers and advocacy organisations. The roundtables tested the ACT government's initial approach to Thriving Kids, including the proposed vision, guiding principles and service components. Stakeholders generally supported the proposed direction and emphasised the importance of cross-sector collaboration, smoother transitions between mainstream services, Thriving Kids and the NDIS, and inclusive access to services. This feedback aligns with the ACT government's Thriving Kids approach which focuses on an integrated, accessible service system that supports children and families through multiple entry points and builds on existing services.

On 22 April 2026, also as part of phase 1 consultation, I held a Thriving Kids roundtable

with 11 parents, carers and kin. Participants were identified by key community partners to ensure strong representation of lived experience. The roundtable focused on understanding strengths and gaps in the current service system, how best to communicate Thriving Kids developments to families, and how services can embed child- and family-centred approaches. Participants emphasised the need for clearer information about available services and the timing of rollout.

Following the roundtables, the ACT government has updated the Thriving Kids website. This website will continue to be updated accordingly as new information is available. Since the roundtables, we have noticed increased community interest in Thriving Kids and have established processes to receive, log and respond to enquiries from community organisations and stakeholders, supporting ongoing engagement and consistent communication as implementation progresses.

In addition to the consultation already outlined, the ACT government has funded National Disability Services ACT, or NDS, and the ACT Disability Directed Advocacy Caucus to undertake service mapping across the non-government sector and provide feedback from the people and groups they represent. Both projects are progressing well. The ACT Disability Directed Advocacy Caucus has provided preliminary service mapping advice and supported connection for parents and carers with the government roundtables. Women with Disability ACT and ACT Down Syndrome and Intellectual Disability has undertaken extensive service mapping on general supports, and the NDS has recently held sector roundtables on Thriving Kids to inform a report to government by September this year.

Workforce readiness has also been identified as a key area of interest during consultations. I want to reassure stakeholders that the ACT government is actively addressing workforce planning and development to ensure a capable and work-ready workforce is in place by 1 October 2026. On 9 April 2026, I attended a workforce roundtable organised by the University of Canberra to discuss workforce challenges and opportunities related to Thriving Kids in the ACT. Discussions focused on coordinated approaches involving government, tertiary institutions, the private sector and the commonwealth. Workforce engagement will continue, with updates provided to affected partners and stakeholders as implementation progresses. Following positive feedback from the first event, UC and the ACT government are looking at options for a follow-up event.

Regarding government decisions and policy directions arising from the planning, the ACT continues to progress informed service design as outlined earlier in this statement. In December 2025, the Thriving Kids Advisory Group released their final report to the Australian government. The report proposes a comprehensive national model for Thriving Kids to be considered by all governments as part of their design and negotiations. The proposed model reflects feedback from a range of stakeholders. It also complements findings from the inquiry into the Thriving Kids initiative from the House of Representatives' Standing Committee on Health, Aged Care and Disability.

Through the bilateral agreement, governments have agreed there will be a range of different supports available under Thriving Kids that align with the Thriving Kids national model. Supports will predominantly be provided in the environments where children live, learn and play. This will include supports under each of the following

domains.

First, activities that support greater community, parent, family and kin awareness of developmental delay and neurodevelopmental difference, including autism. This will support early identification where a child may be developing differently to their peers.

Second, early identification of children with developmental delay and neurodevelopmental difference through routine child development and health assessments or checks.

Third, information, advice and navigation, including national and local digital and phone based information and advice on childhood development and autism. It also includes navigation support to help children and families understand where and how to access relevant supports. Information on Thriving Kids supports will also be readily accessible to the community and key workforces who interact with or may refer children for supports.

Fourth, best practice parenting supports and programs. These are programs and supports which will empower families, carers and kin with resources and skills to assist and improve their child's learning and development through everyday activities. These supports will provide a soft entry, or easy access, for eligible families and may include a mix of online and in-person options. This could include online courses, short videos, resources families can use at home, peer support groups, supported playgroups, family programs, self-advocacy supports, and culturally safe training.

Fifth, targeted supports for children will be available for children who need additional help beyond parenting supports and programs. These will be accessed through nationally consistent functional needs identification and triage arrangements. This includes things like: group and one-on-one allied health delivered by trained workers such as occupational therapists, speech pathologists, physiotherapists, audiologists and psychologists, and might also include access to low-cost assistive technology, aids or equipment where needed; more intensive capacity-building to support families with complex needs and circumstances, and these supports will help families build their child's strengths, navigate key transition points, like entering school, and assist if the family is accessing supports from a range of different people under Thriving Kids.

Thriving Kids supports and services will be guided by a range of principles, including informed by evidence, neuro-affirming, child-centred, family-centred, and strength-based. They will also consider the needs of intersectional cohorts such as First Nations people, culturally and linguistically diverse people, and will consider effective approaches in regional, rural and remote areas. The ACT government will continue to work closely with the commonwealth over the coming months to meet all remaining requirements under the bilateral agreement and to ensure Thriving Kids services commence and progressively roll out from 1 October 2026.

Regarding safeguards and assessment criteria, these will be considered in phases 2 and 3. I will provide more information in future updates. I do however note that a diagnosis will not be required for Thriving Kids and that supports will be considered based on the functional need of children displaying developmental delay or autism. The move away from a diagnosis approach will address one of the key concerns of the current settings,

whereby supports are delayed due to the time needed for a diagnosis to distinguish between developmental delay as part of a child's personal development trajectory or developmental delay due to disability and other more permanent factors.

I want to reassure the Canberra community that the ACT government will continue to prioritise an approach to Thriving Kids that places children, their families and carers at the centre of all supports. This approach is designed to strengthen the broader service ecosystem and build a coordinated system of supports that meets the needs of children and families in the ACT.

As we work towards 1 October 2026, the ACT government will focus on continued community engagement and on ensuring that the rollout of Thriving Kids in the ACT strengthens existing supports rather than fragments them. Our priority is a joined-up system that families can navigate with confidence and trust and which delivers improved early intervention outcomes for children and their families.

I present the following paper:

NDIS Foundational Supports—Implementation and reporting—Assembly resolution of 24 September 2025—Government response—Ministerial statement, 27 May 2026.

I move:

That the Assembly take note of the paper.

MISS NUTTALL (Brindabella) (11.40): I thank the minister for her statement and rise to speak to her update on changes to the NDIS and foundational supports, including Thriving Kids. Also, I acknowledge Ms Barry, whose motion compelled these updates every six months. Thank you for that.

My Greens colleagues and I have been vocal, both in and out of this place, about our strong opposition to cutting the NDIS. We stand against the rushing of changes which will leave the community without a proper safety net as they lose support from their NDIS plan and are forced to navigate a different service landscape, which we have just heard is still in development. It is fundamentally wrong to take supports away from people with a disability in our community who rely on them, and I will continue to make noise about this.

I am opposed to these cuts because our community is. They have told me they are scared and that they need someone to advocate for them because they feel that, respectively, the governments are not doing that, and because they have the evidence of having supports taken away from them in real time to confirm that it is not just a feeling; it is their lived reality right now. It is also for this reason that I recognise that foundational supports in our territory must work. So I want to be clear that the ACT Greens are committed to working constructively with the government to do what we can to ensure that Thriving Kids and other foundational supports come into place for the children and families who need them.

I welcome the consultation through roundtables which have taken place so far, and I

implore the government to continue consultation that enables not just consultation but proper co-design. I sincerely thank the incredible advocacy bodies and disability service providers who have engaged in this consultation and service mapping so far: the NDS, Advocacy for Inclusion, Women with Disabilities ACT, ACT Down Syndrome and Intellectual Disability, and all those who have given their time and wisdom so generously and graciously. Thank you for your tireless advocacy. I know it often comes at a cost to you. And I thank those who have been doing hours of unpaid work fighting the NDIS cuts and educating us on what they mean for people with a disability.

While I appreciate the update on the progression of foundational supports with respect to Thriving Kids, I wish to ask the government about what they are doing for adults with a disability. There are people in our communities who have been left out of the conversation and are losing their supports without getting a program like Thriving Kids. These people deserve access too and they deserve the same opportunity and access to engage in community life.

I appreciate the minister's transparency that the \$90 million that the ACT provisioned for foundational supports back in the 2024-25 budget is being drawn down for the ACT's contribution to Thriving Kids, but where is the rest of the money going? It is a couple of years old now. We provisioned that funding clearly because it mattered. And we know adults are losing access to the NDIS in real time, so they will need foundational supports. So why have we heard radio silence on that matter? I also note that the minister remarked on noticing increased interest in Thriving Kids recently and since the roundtables, and I cannot help but wonder why that might be.

There are grim things happening federally. To me, one of the most horrifying bits about the NDIS cuts is how Labor has cut people's individual funding allocations for "individualised social, civic and community participation supports and capacity-building for daily activities". The language in the government's budget was that the funding in people's plans for this support was being "reset". I use quote marks here because, euphemism or not, the Labor government must realise that people are already feeling the loss of those supports.

The replacement for these funds, which actually resembles a 30 per cent reduction, is the Inclusive Communities Fund. The fund is meant to give money to community organisations to build new options for people with a disability to participate in their local community, but, in reality, this funding replaces a fraction of what will be cut from participant plans. Analysis from UNSW has said it also represents a re-allocation of funding away from people with a disability and towards organisations that will decide which services are offered. This change is inconsistent with the scheme's philosophy of personalisation and participant choice.

People with a disability deserve to participate in their community—in our shared community. They deserve to have a government which supports them to do as much, and they deserve to have transparency and input on decisions which will affect their lives. "Nothing about us with us" is not a catchy slogan; it is a principle and a pillar which must drive all of our services and policy decisions in the ACT. So, while the minister speaks about an ecosystem of support, I would like to remind the government that this ecosystem must strengthen individual agency while increasing the coordination and availability of community supports. I know many are worried it will not, and I

implore the government to listen to those people now. People in our community are hurting and they are scared. I will continue to stand alongside them and speak their hurt in this place. We cannot ignore it.

I look forward to reading the full implementation plan of Thriving Kids, which the government has told us they will provide by the end of this month—which will be, hopefully, by the end of this week—and I thank the minister for her statement.

MR EMERSON (Kurrajong) (11.45): I thank the minister for providing this update to the Assembly this morning and, like Miss Nuttall, thank Ms Barry for moving a motion to ensure that occurs. I also thank the minister and her office for engaging with me and my office on this important matter, which is having a massive impact on our community—a largely not-understood impact.

Last week, I co-hosted a town hall with Senator David Pocock and fellow Independent Fiona Carrick MLA on the NDIS changes being proposed by the federal government. Over 150 Canberrans participated in that room and also online. It is clear that there is a huge amount of stress, fear and uncertainty in the disability community at the moment—as is often the case, given the level of change that seems to be occurring in this policy area. It meant a lot to hear directly from people in our community about how the NDIS affects their lives already and about the impact of the multiple major changes to the scheme that have been announced over recent months and years, often with barely any detail. Mostly, though, it was an evening of questions—people raising questions and raising concerns that no-one in the room seemed to be able to answer. I want to voice some of those concerns and questions in response to the statement from the minister this morning.

Here is a sampling. “The NDIA claimed to consult with people with disability, families and health professionals, but, whenever new changes are introduced, it is clear that we are ignored. How can we ensure that consultations are being acted upon and not just done for appearances?” “I have heard estimates that, for every dollar spent on the NDIS, \$2.25 was returned to the economy. Is this accurate or is it missing some information? If it is an accurate estimate, why would we try to reduce spending in this area?” “Women with Disability Australia has significant concern about the disproportionate impact reforms will have on women, girls and gender-diverse people with disability. How comprehensive was the federal government’s gender impact assessment of the bill?”

“The people in Canberra that will be removed from the NDIS and those who never got access to the NDIS will need foundational support like Thriving Kids and psychosocial foundational supports up and running fast. How will the ACT do this?” “Waitlists for early intervention in the ACT are 12 to 18 months long, and children and families are missing out on crucial support. How can we reduce waitlist times?” “Children with rare genetic or neurological conditions frequently access the NDIS under early intervention pathways while waiting for a formal diagnosis. How will these children be referred for individualised treatment under Thriving Kids?” “Shorten said the NDIS is the only life raft, and many people with significant support needs do not qualify for the NDIS. What other options will be made available? And are they more financially viable than simply increasing the NDIS’s capacity?”

“Many allied health providers are sole traders or small- to medium-sized businesses. Data shows that NDIS pricing changes have greatly affected these providers and their clients. How will the government support business to navigate these changes?” “New South Wales has indicated that Thriving Kids will be supported by NGOs. Is it likely that the ACT will follow this approach? Under this model, families will have limited choice and control in selecting providers they find most suitable for their needs. Will Thriving Kids hold the same values of choice and control as the NDIS? Will families be able to work with providers who align with their child’s needs? Or will families only be offered one approach, similar to public health?” “How will my daughter continue work full-time if her one-to-one social and community participation funding is reduced, given her severe disability and the need for support to participate safely and productively?” “There needs to be more support in schools, as in OT, speech pathologists and physiotherapists, psychiatrists, and clinical psychologists employed in schools, and even workplaces for people with disability. Also more accessibility in housing.”

“It is becoming increasingly difficult to get onto the NDIS without spending significant amounts on specialists, occupational therapists and appointments. How can low-income earners be supported to access the NDIS?” “Much of NDIS funding is spent on costs that the NDIS generates for itself, like demanding a vastly expensive occupational therapy report to check if a person clearly unable to mobilise needs a wheelchair.” “NDIS participants seem to have a bad time at Canberra Hospital or North Canberra Hospital, in the medical wards and the adult mental health wards. How can we fix or improve this? There is also no community nursing funded for wound care.” “So-called moderate autism is actually level 2 autism and requires substantial support. One hour of occupational therapy a fortnight is not substantial, yet this cohort is constantly targeted.”

“Thriving Kids appears to rely on key workers who frequently hold education degrees rather than healthcare qualifications. How can families be confident they are getting accurate healthcare assessments and intervention under this approach? The ACT government should fund community clinical nurse consultants and registered nurses to do wound care, catheter care, PEG feeding, stoma bags, and so on, as the NDIS can only fund a certain amount of nursing. The ACT needs to step up.” “What can you do to ensure that the Thriving Kids program, about which we know so little beyond that it will be cheaper, does not leave Canberra’s vulnerable children with disabilities worse off? Given Thriving Kids is going to be managed by each state, are there plans for how cross-border families will be supported, including New South Wales children attending ACT schools?”

This one is telling: “I have been trying to work out what ‘foundational supports’ actually means. Whatever it tells me, they will not actually be useful for a lot of families. We need access to support workers, not therapy groups or a consult with a nurse et cetera. The Thriving Kids program and the changes proposed to early intervention in NDIS require the parents to take on even more roles and responsibilities with access of resources to support. This is not acceptable.”

“People with schizophrenia or bipolar can be functional when assessed and in crisis six hours later. Static assessments will systematically fail the psychosocial cohort. Will episodic conditions be accounted for in these new assessment tools? Any disabled

people's functional impairment involves pain, energy limitations, severe debilitating fatigue, an inability to be upright et cetera. These are not resolved by external services. How will we protect these complex needs?" "What are you doing for parents to support them and show that parenting a child with extra needs is above the threshold of normative parenting? Why is it acceptable to put extra pressure on families that are already struggling? How will we assist families who, like mine, face gaps in daycare access and now will not have funding for support workers? How will our flawed public health system cope when the NDIS is not an option, especially when the system is pushing people into the NDIS and charging for services that were previously free."

"How will the ACT government support the fallout from the current model, where more than six months of child development services support leads to referrals to the NDIS and immediate discharge? Similarly, how will the current system change when hospital discharges refer the CDS, but access to CDS is lost once referred to NDIS, leading to out-of-pocket costs? How can ACT support thriving children when referrals are primarily directed to the NDIS?"

That is just a third of the questions and concerns that were raised, so I think I will leave it there. There is plenty more to walk through. You can see the frustration. There are a lot of questions to answer. I accept that it is not so much the territory government's fault that we are in this position, but the reality is that we are. I think we should all be appalled. I am certainly appalled at how these reforms have progressed. Who would withdraw systems of support before ensuring that new systems are in place to pick up the people those systems are supporting? I would not think this is something that we would accept in any area of service provision, and to accept this in the area of disability service provision seems particularly cruel. It is unfair that people with disability and their loved ones have been treated in this way—left in the dark with confusing messages about how or if their needs will be supported moving forward, significant announcements having been made about changes to eligibility in the service system without first establishing really clear pathways to the necessary supports.

All of that said, the ACT is small enough to move quickly and to get this right. I am really hopeful that is what we do. I have been calling for the ACT government to show leadership and grasp that opportunity over multiple months, and I know that many other members have been doing the same. I said I have some sympathy for the territory government given the lack of clarity from the commonwealth, but, at the same time, the reality is that all states and territories agreed back in December 2023 that they would be responsible for delivering foundational supports. This is something that I have been asking about over the last 18 months in estimates and annual reports hearings, and I know other members have as well.

In February 2025, I asked about the rollout of foundational supports, which at that time was set to be rolled out from 1 July 2025. Of course, that did not occur. The committee recommended that the ACT government provide a revised roadmap for the implementation of the changes to foundational supports in the ACT. That recommendation was noted by the government last September. Then, in July during estimates, I asked for an updated timeline for foundational supports. The minister stated they were reluctant to give one because they did not want to set everyone's expectations after having not met the 1 July 2025 timeline. The committee then recommended that the ACT government provide additional transparency to the community about the

rollout timeline of foundational supports. That recommendation was noted.

The Productivity Commission signalled all the problems that we are facing in their 2011 report on how to do this right and how this could be done wrong. That report reflected on many of the issues we are encountering now and on the problem with the old system before the NDIS was established, saying:

People with disabilities and their carers do not get the certainty of lifelong support needed for proper life planning and cannot avoid the extreme anxiety about the adequacy of future funded support when informal care is no longer reasonable or feasible.

The Canberrans I am hearing from fear that the old system is the system that we might be returning to. I really hope that is not the case. We cannot allow that to be the case. I am keen to work constructively across the Assembly to ensure that does not happen here in the ACT.

MR CAIN (Ginninderra) (11.56): I want to thank the minister for her statement, and I especially want to thank Ms Barry for moving the motion last year that has compelled the minister to keep this Assembly updated. I would like to thank Miss Nuttall and Mr Emerson as well for their commentary and ongoing support.

I will pick out a couple of things from the minister's statement. The minister touched on two community round tables with 25 stakeholders—and I have talked about this before. It would be very nice to know to whom the minister has spoken and how these stakeholders were selected. I would have thought that, in a ministerial statement, the minister would have reflected on who actually attended these stakeholder gatherings. Some of the groups that I have spoken to—support agencies and registered providers—have not heard anything. So, Minister, there is an opportunity for you to be a bit more transparent, I believe, with a statement on the status of NDIS changes and the effect in the ACT.

I note as well that the minister talked about a round table with 11 parents, carers and kin. How were these selected? I hate to be cynical in this place, but did you select people that were just going to go along with your lines? That is an option, of course, but I hope you had a genuine wide range of views in both these parent catch-ups and the round tables. But I do not know, because I do not know how you have selected these participants nor who they are. So, again, a bit more transparency would be appreciated, Minister.

I do note as well that, with such an important area of our community support, support for our community with those who carry disabilities, carers and support agencies—the minister has released 10 media releases this year, and none of them have been about her role as Minister for Disability. Again, I encourage the minister to be a bit more transparent with the community—and not just under compulsion in this place, which is why there is this ministerial statement. Again, I thank Ms Barry for bringing that motion that really has compelled the minister to give us an update. But what about the community, Minister? You have certainly had time to craft media releases—some of them jointly, but 10 come under your own name. Where is a message to our community about the effect of the NDIS changes on our community, the Thriving Kids rollout and

your role as Minister for Disability? Perhaps this morning we can prompt you to do so.

MS ORR (Yerrabi—Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, Minister for Climate Change, Environment, Energy and Water, Minister for Disability, Carers and Community Services and Minister for Seniors and Veterans) (11.59): In closing, I can already answer some of the questions that have been raised by the various speakers in the discussion today. I would like to thank everyone for their contribution. I would note that in this particular response I have focused specifically on the “calls on” of Ms Barry’s motion, as I noted in my statement, and that I have provided a lot of other statements and updates regarding the much broader range of reforms that have been under progression.

Seeing as Mr Cain’s comments are the most freshest in my mind, I will pick up on those first. As I have said, I have always said I will provide updates, and I have done so without needing to be compelled. I will continue to provide updates, as I have always said I will, as more information comes to hand and I am in a position to do so. I would note that a lot of the negotiations to date so far between the commonwealth and the states and territories have meant that I am not in a position to put broad-ranging information on the public record while those are undergoing. But, wherever I have been able to, I have.

With regard to questions around the selection of stakeholders and who has attended, the stakeholders at the forums for the sector were put up from our community sector partners and they were then invited. There was certainly not an exclusive attendee list. We actually added in additional time and opportunities for people to attend, because of the demand that was there. I would encourage Mr Cain and any member of this place to, if there is an organisation that is approaching them saying they would like more information that they have not heard, either get in touch with my office or direct them to the HCSD website where they can sign up to get more information. I would note I get a lot of organisations, for-profit and not-for-profit, as well as individuals and community groups emailing my office looking for information. It is not unusual, I think, at this point in time. There are a lot of people who have a lot of questions and are seeking out information. We might already be aware of that group but, if you know of them, send them our way. We are more than happy to engage and talk.

I would also like to respond to Mr Cain’s statement about the participants and the families and how they were selected for the families roundtable. As I said in my statement, we worked with our not-for-profit partners, ACT Down Syndrome and Intellectual Disability, Playgroups ACT and a range of others. They were actually the ones who brought forward the participants within their own programs and own social networks to come forward and have the discussion. So it was not at all selected by government—just to ease any of Mr Cain concerns that there is a bit of a stitch-up going on. It was the case that they were put forward from those within our community sector partners who work with the people in our community who really have that key information of that lived experience. It was very positive round table. I think we could have quite happily stayed all afternoon, but I think we can look to have follow-ups, and there will be lots of opportunities.

The other thing I would like to pick up is that Miss Nuttall I think in her comments made reference to an implementation plan and that being published. I would like to

clarify that, certainly while I have made reference to it in a point of being transparent, it is an intergovernmental agreement document. I would have to double-check if we are actually in a position to publish that, but I will get back to Miss Nuttall on that one. It certainly does exist. It is part of the agreement, and I can assure Miss Nuttall that in the information I provided today she has a very good overview of what is in that document, whether we are allowed to publish it or not.

The last thing I would like to note is that there are a lot of reforms currently going on across the NDIS, particularly following the further announcements made in Minister Butler's second Press Club address. A lot of the points that Miss Nuttall and Mr Emerson raised—and particularly a number of questions that Mr Emerson has put that he has had raised with him by stakeholders—go to a number of reforms that would sit outside of the Thriving Kids program in particular, which is what today's ministerial statement was about. I know Mr Emerson has been engaging with my office and has sent through a number of questions which we have been able to provide responses to with the best information we have to hand. I think there were a few questions in there I have not heard yet. I would encourage Mr Emerson to continue to work with my office to get the answers to those questions as best as we can. Certainly the offer is there for others as well if they wish to take that opportunity.

But, as we work through what is quite extensive, I will continue to provide updates. I will continue to look to where we can put information out. In the spirit of some of the members who said they were very happy to work collaboratively, I certainly am, too, as we look to get a good outcome for our community.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Standing orders—suspension

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

That so much of the standing orders be suspended as would prevent Committee business scheduled for today being called on at a later hour this day.

Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence—Strategy Ministerial statement

DR PATERSON (Murrumbidgee—Minister for Police, Fire and Emergency Services, Minister for Women, Minister for the Prevention of Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence, Minister for Corrections and Minister for Gaming Reform) (12.04): Thank you to everyone for being so patient through this morning's business to get to this point today. I rise to present the annual 2026 domestic, family and sexual violence ministerial statement and to table the ACT Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Strategy 2026-2036 and its first action plan.

Over recent weeks, while the nation was reeling from the horror of what was done to Kumanjayi Little Baby in Alice Springs, we learnt of the shocking murders of a woman and two children in Western Sydney. While these cases have received national attention, there have also been lives lost here in the ACT, which have significant

ramifications for our community as a whole.

Each November, I attend events during the 16 Days of Activism, including Zonta's event, where they ring the Nara Peace Bell across the lake for all the lives lost over the previous 12 months to domestic and family violence. Every year, the number of lives lost is unacceptable. These numbers are not just numbers; they are people—people with friends, families and colleagues; people with hobbies, hopes and aspirations for their future. The loss of every individual is a tragedy, and a tragedy which could have been avoided.

However, the number of lives lost does not reflect the number of survivors in our community. To victim-survivors in our community, I say: you are seen, you are heard, you are believed and you deserve safety and dignity and healing. What I commit to is that, when you reach out for help, there is a coordinated, trauma-informed, holistic system there to respond. I also commit, on behalf of the ACT government, to a vision of a Canberra community that is safe and equitable and free from domestic, family and sexual violence. This violence is not inevitable, and it is incumbent on all of us to reflect how we can take action to challenge, to intervene, to support, to shelter and to keep believing that we can build a future free from gender-based violence.

I feel the weight of responsibility to drive this work forward as the Minister for the Prevention of Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence, both to honour those whose lives have been taken, to protect and support people currently at risk of harm or who have experienced and survived harm and to ensure that future generations do not experience this. The responsibility is really on all ministers, all politicians, all government departments and public servants, all businesses, all sporting clubs, all religious and community organisations, all households and all individuals—all of us. Ending this violence requires collective responsibility and action.

It is in this context that I am today tabling the ACT's Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Strategy. This strategy will guide our efforts to address the epidemic of violence in our community over the next 10 years. It provides critical, future-focused outcomes specific to the ACT, which will sit alongside the goals of the National Plan to End Violence Against Women and Children and the Our Ways—Strong Ways—Our Voices Plan. I intend that this vision and this strategy will drive real and impactful change.

The strategy sets out six interconnected outcomes that will guide action over the next 10 years to progress us towards a future where our beautiful city is free from this violence. To achieve this vision, the outcomes reflect the need to work across the full spectrum from primary prevention, including systemic change to address population drivers of violence, through to early intervention and crisis response all the way to recovery and healing. Across these domains, we must ensure we resource effective, tailored and responsive initiatives and interventions across a cohesive and integrated system.

The strategy will be implemented through a series of action plans over the next decade. Importantly, we are building on what has already been achieved, including effective domestic, family and sexual violence programs and services currently provided. It also builds on existing advice to government, such as *The long yarn* report, the *Listen. Take*

action to prevent, believe and heal report and the Sexual Assault (Police) Review. The strategy will take forward the commitments under these critical reports and guide future government action against them.

This work requires sustained long-term investment. That is why the ACT government is investing \$47 million over the next four years to implement the strategy, with \$44 million dedicated to frontline services. The remaining \$3.5 million will support system reforms over the next two years, including establishing a specialist sector network to support advocacy, coordination and workforce development for domestic, family and sexual violence services, including Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations; funding to establish a dedicated information-sharing coordinator role; resourcing to deliver training on the Risk Assessment and Management Framework; and work towards developing a primary prevention model for the ACT.

Today's statement is also the annual ministerial statement on domestic, family and sexual violence, outlining our progress in addressing domestic, family and sexual violence over the past 12 months. What I hope will be clear is that the strategy provides a framework for work that is already underway but also provides the future vision of what comes next.

Outcome 1 in the strategy states that victim-survivors have access to support at all stages of their journey through early intervention, crisis, justice and healing. I want to thank our frontline services for their dedication in responding to the growing demand and increasing complexity of need from victim-survivors. I acknowledge the impacts of this on your organisations and commit to continuing to work in partnership with you to address these pressures. Over the past 12 months, victim-survivors from a range of backgrounds have been able to access support from local services funded by the government. The Multicultural Women's Service, delivered by Multicultural Hub, has provided culturally responsive case management for CALD women experiencing domestic and family violence. The emerging Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations are delivering culturally safe, trauma-informed services, including advocacy and programs for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community.

There have also been critical programs providing therapeutic support to children and young people and targeted support for victims of sexual violence running over the past 12 months. This includes the establishment Sexual Assault Advocates—which were funded in last year's budget—who will be embedded within the Sexual Assault and Child Abuse teams within ACT Policing.

Over the past year, the voices of victim-survivors have been centred in the policy work we have done. They have been integral to the development of the strategy that I table today and the work that we will be introducing tomorrow on coercive control. I am proud to have heard the voices of victim-survivors directly, and I want to thank Women's Health Matters for their incredible work in delivering the Victim Survivor Voices project. The first action plan, as tabled today, continues this focus. It is dedicated to resourcing ongoing funding for our critical services; continued funding for programs for children and young people; addressing service gaps for marginalised communities and priority populations, including the development of an LGBTIQ+ specific program and counselling supports for women from CALD communities; and continued funding for sexual violence supports.

Outcome 2 centres on the role of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities in responding to domestic, family and sexual violence. As we mark the beginning of National Reconciliation Week, I want to take this opportunity to acknowledge the disproportionate rates of domestic, family and sexual violence experienced by the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community. I want to highlight the critical place that community-controlled organisations have in working with community to address this.

Over the past year, we have made important progress in recognising and supporting the leadership of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities as part of our commitment to Closing the Gap Target 13. In October, I was pleased to formally respond, on behalf of the government, to *The long yarn* report, agreeing to all 12 recommendations. Last year's budget allocated \$6 million over three years to support Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations delivering domestic, family and sexual violence services and a community and professional "violence is not our way" education campaign. Through this year's budget, we will also establish a grants pool of \$2 million over the next four years to ensure culturally responsive supports exist for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander victims of sexual violence.

Earlier this year, I was pleased to endorse the Our Ways—Strong Ways—Our Voices plan, which is a 10-year national plan to guide and support national coordination towards ending this violence. The ACT government is also committed to embedding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities in the solutions that break cycles of harm, ensuring their voices, leadership and lived experience play an essential role in shaping our responses.

Outcome 3 of the strategy speaks to the importance of engaging people who use violence and supporting them to change. The ACT government is taking action to strengthen our approach to responding to people who use violence, both through behaviour change interventions and through increased accountability through our justice system. In last year's budget, with support from the commonwealth, the Caring Dads program for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander fathers was adapted and is being delivered by Yeddung Mura Aboriginal Corporation. We are trialling another targeted version of the Caring Dads program at Directions Health Services to engage men with alcohol and drug issues. We also continue to support the Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Men's Non-Violence Behaviour Change program delivered by Multicultural Hub.

These programs reflect the government's commitment to ensuring the right system responses exist to engage people who use violence. Over the next two years, we will continue the DVCS Room4Change program and increase funding for Everyman's perpetrator programs. We will also continue to collaborate across jurisdictions on the development of national standards for behaviour change work. Work with perpetrators must always prioritise the safety of victim-survivors. Over the last 12 months, the intensive case coordination of high-risk domestic and family violence cases through the Family Violence Safety Action Program has continued to operate, enhancing whole-of-system capacity to promote safety and hold perpetrators to account.

The role of ACT Policing in holding accountable people who use violence is also

critical, and I will continue to work closely with ACT Policing to ensure they are equipped to correctly identify and respond to people using violence. Over the last five, the ACT government has significantly increased resourcing to ACT Policing to investigate sexual violence, including through the creation of additional team in last year's budget. To support this, ACT Policing created a new family and sexual violence portfolio, including the Domestic and Family Violence Investigations Unit, to ensure a more integrated model of sexual offence, child abuse and family violence investigations within the crime stream.

Outcome 4 reflects my earlier comments about this being everyone's responsibility, stating "all people actively model safe and respectful behaviours and are empowered to embody and enact social change". Over the last 12 months, we have continued to deliver initiatives and campaigns to build capacity and engage people from all walks of life in actively building a community free from violence. We are progressing this work alongside the federal government through the Women's and Women's Safety Ministerial Council and informed by the work of the E-Safety Commissioner and the National Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Commissioner.

In 2025, the ACT delivered a community awareness campaign focused on helping Canberrans to recognise signs of coercive control and highlight available support services. We also launched an affirmative consent campaign targeting Canberrans aged 18 to 40 across social media, dating apps, in clubs and in licensed venues. The campaign aimed to empower all Canberrans with the knowledge and confidence to seek and give clear, enthusiastic and ongoing consent in sexual interactions. I am pleased to be able to continue this campaign throughout the next year, funded by the Crime Prevention Fund. I was privileged to attend many community-led events aimed at raising awareness and providing practical tools to support violence prevention and response work, including in relation to technology-facilitated abuse and coercive control. This work will continue to be progressed through the first action plan.

Outcome 5 relates to building a more connected and responsive system in the ACT. A coordinated and effective service system is vital to enabling positive outcomes for victim-survivors, families and communities impacted by domestic, family and sexual violence. Over the past year, we have progressed significant system reforms to improve coordination and capability, while supporting long-term cultural change. This includes work to progress the implementation of the Information Sharing Scheme, a significant whole-of-government reform which will allow for information sharing between prescribed entities. The scheme supports these entities to better manage risk and support safety of victim-survivors, while keeping perpetrators accountable and encouraging a consistent and integrated system response.

As part of this, through 2025-26, we have been progressing updates to the Domestic and Family Violence Risk Assessment and Management Framework. The updated RAMF is an essential element of the Information Sharing Scheme. Updates have focused on greater integration of coercive control, a cultural safety review, alignment with contemporary best practice and ACT information-sharing legislation, and the development of risk assessment and screening tools to support frontline workers. This will help to create a shared language and understanding of domestic and family violence, including coercive control, supporting broader cultural change across the ACT service system. The first action plan provides two years of funding to embed

RAMF training as a critical function of an effective domestic, family and sexual violence system.

A key component of a coordinated and integrated system is continuously building the capability of different agencies to contribute to victim-survivor safety. A recent example of this is Housing ACT's updated domestic and family violence policy, which provides guidance to Housing ACT staff for consistent decision-making in response to victim-survivors. It also supports Housing ACT to make person-centred decisions and refer victim-survivors and perpetrators to services available to meet their needs.

Outcome 6 states that the ACT's systems, communities, organisations and institutions play a direct and active role in addressing, responding to and preventing domestic, family and sexual violence. While work across all domains has a preventative function, the ACT government is focused on ensuring we use all available levers to drive violence prevention work, including community education, regulation of key industries and sectors and work to build healthy masculinities and combat harmful gender norms.

We are in the early stages of building an approach to primary prevention, which means working at a whole-of-population level to address drivers of violence by changing attitudes, norms, practices and power structures which normalise and condone harmful behaviour. This is why the ACT government has invested \$248,000 in this year's budget for Women's Health Matters to scope a primary prevention infrastructure model for the ACT. This will support us to understand existing primary prevention activities and gaps across government, community and institutional settings, so that we can accelerate prevention programs. This work will capture our existing efforts, including the continued delivery of sexual health and respectful relationships education across all ACT schools. On the regulation front, the Attorney General introduced the Liquor Amendment Bill 2025, which proposed reforms to limit same-day alcohol delivery, given what research shows about the effect of alcohol in increasing the frequency and severity of violence.

I am heartened every day by the passion and determination of so many Canberrans to change the story in our community about domestic, family and sexual violence. This work takes many forms and exists in every setting within our community, from individual households right up to Parliament House. I want to reiterate my thanks and acknowledge the significant contribution from our frontline services, our Aboriginal Community-Controlled Organisations, community groups and individuals, including victim-survivors, who have all provided their knowledge, insights and expertise to help us develop the strategy.

I would also like to thank the dedicated staff in the Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Office, in particular Nicola Vaughan, Rachel Grant, Susan McDonald, Lin Zhao-Balogh, Maya Tomison and Gerry Banks. I would like to thank you for your sustained effort in achieving this fantastic outcome today for our territory.

In tabling the strategy and first action plan, I acknowledge that this is just a piece of paper—albeit one which reflects the government's ongoing commitment to realise our vision of a safer Canberra. To achieve this vision, we must bring this document to life. We must work together; we must support best practice approaches; we must listen and be led by those with lived experience, with cultural knowledge and specialist expertise;

and we must never lose sight of the urgency Lives depend on it.

I present the following papers:

ACT Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Strategy 2026-2036—

Strategy, undated.

First Action Plan 2026-2028, undated.

2026 Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Strategy—Ministerial statement,
27 May 2026.

I move:

That the Assembly take note of the ministerial statement.

MS CASTLEY (Yerrabi) (12.25): At this stage I have a copy of the statement, but not the strategy. So I am just going to talk about the statement and what we have just heard. I am really looking forward to getting the strategy. I appreciate the work that has gone into this. It sounds like there are lots of great things in place.

But there was something that caused me to raise my eyebrows—a terminology that we heard this morning—and that is why I am speaking today. It was a quote that said “speaks to the importance of engaging people who use violence and supporting them to change”. Personally, I really struggle with this description of people who beat their loved ones. We say that they are “people who use violence” and suggesting that we need to support them after they abuse others. This language abstracts away from what is happening and who is responsible. We are talking about people who deliberately, repeatedly and knowingly use violence, abuse and control against the people who love them. If we want to combat the scourge of domestic and family violence in the ACT, we cannot be afraid to say what is happening in clear language. We cannot be afraid to say that violence and abuse is wrong, that it is a crime and that abusers and perpetrators will go to prison.

I admit that I am a sceptic when it comes to behavioural change programs. I have not personally seen compelling evidence that it is effective on a large scale. I am not alone here. Just last week, the *Journal of Family Violence* published a meta-analysis of intervention programs, which found that the evidence in support was weak and far from robust. We simply do not know if these programs, as I say, work on a large scale yet. That is what we want it to do. We want the violence to stop. Despite the millions of dollars that we have put into it, I just do not believe we have got time to guess. If we want to change the culture around domestic and family violence to the point that it materially changes behaviour and choices, you have to make it clear that abusers and perpetrators will be charged, convicted and imprisoned. You need to create a culture where people know that, if they break the law and harm a loved one, there will be consequences. This is what happens. It is a choice.

This is the whole reason I have been fighting for coercive control legislation. I am so excited about all that is going on this week and the work that is going on. We know that it creates an offence which allows police to intervene, charge and prosecute abusers and perpetrators before their behaviour escalates to the point where they put a loved one in

hospital or the morgue. As a New South Wales study has found, coercive control was present in almost every single DV homicide that they studied. I realise this approach is not everyone's cup of tea and some will see it as hardline, but we know it works and it keeps people safe.

I have been in and around domestic violence for too many years of my life. I have seen it in my home. I have seen it in my friends' homes. I have heard far too many stories of Canberrans who deserve to be protected and were let down. If we want to change the culture, let's be honest about what is happening and who is responsible and let's focus on the interventions that will make the biggest difference.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

National Multicultural Festival 2026

Ministerial statement

MR PETTERSSON (Yerrabi—Minister for Business, Arts and Creative Industries, Minister for Children, Youth and Families, Minister for Multicultural Affairs and Minister for Skills, Training and Industrial Relations) (12.29): The National Multicultural Festival is a celebration that every Canberran can be proud of. While national in name, it is a distinctly homegrown event, showcasing the cultures, languages, dance, food and communities that make our city what it is—that make Australia what it is. If you ask Canberrans, they will tell you it gets better every year. That is because it does, and we can prove it. That is why I am delighted to provide the Assembly with this statement on the success of the 2026 National Multicultural Festival.

The 2026 National Multicultural Festival was held across Canberra City and Glebe Park and delivered an outstanding program featuring more than 270 stalls and over 300 performances. Once again, it reinforced its place as Australia's leading celebration of cultural diversity, attracting hundreds of thousands of attendees from across Canberra and beyond, supported by over 280 volunteers. Volunteers are the engine room of the festival, creating a welcoming space where people can connect and celebrate all our community has to offer.

The 2026 National Multicultural Festival delivered an inclusive and energetic program spanning cherished folkloric traditions and bold contemporary cultural expression. This was across music, dance, comedy, spoken word, food and family experiences. The program featured celebrated artists including Troy Cassar-Daley, a MusicACT takeover championing local musicians, and diverse performances encompassing everything from modern mariachi to hip-hop, and Solomon Islands, Scottish and Latin traditions. Families and people of all ages were welcomed, with experiences such as Patch Theatre's Glow & Tell, a kids' Jamaican dancehall party, and interactive programming and respite spaces for families, seniors and people with sensory needs at the Civic Library and Canberra Museum and Gallery.

We supported participation for community groups and local businesses, providing over \$240,000 in funding to deliver performances, cultural activities and experiences across the festival. Anchored in the city centre and Glebe Park, it remains Australia's biggest cultural street party and one of Canberra's most loved local events.

The festival is also a significant driver of economic activity, with the 2026 event adding \$22.8 million to our economy. This includes money spent with our community groups at the festival and with participating local businesses. This also includes money spent in our broader tourism, hospitality and retail sectors, supporting the nearly 21,000 interstate and overseas visitors that attended this year's festival, generating close to 40,000 visitor nights.

A key strength of the festival is that it creates inclusive and welcoming spaces, strengthening community connection. This is reflected in post-event survey results, which saw more than 94 per cent of attendees agreeing the festival makes Canberra feel like a city that values diversity, is rich in culture and entertainment, and has an active, engaged local community. Independent audience satisfaction benchmarking confirms the festival is performing at an exceptional level. Audience feedback for the festival was exceptionally strong, with the highest net promoter score on record, at 61.1, which significantly exceeds industry benchmarks for major public events. This was further demonstrated by nearly nine in 10 attendees indicating they would return next year, and we look forward to their return for yet another wonderful festival in 2027.

Nearly three decades on, the festival continues to evolve, offering new experiences, while staying true to its grassroots community identity, proving that longevity is built on adaptability, authenticity and care for community, not expansion alone. The National Multicultural Festival plays a vital role in strengthening multiculturalism, identity and belonging by providing an inclusive platform where cultures are celebrated and shared, and all Canberrans can see themselves represented. At a time when inclusion and social unity have never been more important, the festival's ability to bring Canberrans together is a great strength. It highlights mutual respect, community connection and the social cohesion that underpins the wellbeing and resilience of our city. I am already looking forward to the 2027 festival.

I present the following paper:

2026 National Multicultural Festival—Ministerial statement, 27 May 2026.

I move:

That the Assembly take note of the paper.

MS BARRY (Ginninderra) (12.34): I thank the minister for his statement today. We all love the Multicultural Festival and we all participate in the Multicultural Festival, but I thought it would be very hypocritical of me if I did not say a word or two. I will be speaking to both this statement and the minister's statement he will give on multiculturalism in general.

The multicultural community brings a lot to this community. It is always interesting to hear this government talk about building social cohesion and the contributions that the multicultural community makes to this society, riding on the coattails of all of the efforts that the multicultural community puts into society and this community without actually providing the support that the community needs. The multicultural community does not ask for much. Most times, what they require are things that are within the remit

of the government to provide. They are self-sufficient and they go along doing their business and contributing to this community without asking for much from the government.

The minister talked about the Multicultural Festival and what a success it was, but what that statement misses to identify is that the application process was so difficult that it deterred some, if not most, of the community organisations who would have applied to participate in the Multicultural Festival. What the statement does not reflect is that community leaders did not consult participants at the Multicultural Festival. They have the local knowledge of the people who had applied to participate and present at the Multicultural Festival, but they were not consulted, so the applications of most of the local participants were rejected and they could not participate in the Multicultural Festival, as they have done in the past. That is very telling of how this government treats the multicultural community. But it is not surprising.

The minister will later talk about the Multiculturalism Act and the Ministerial Advisory Council for Multiculturalism, but I am not sure what that council has delivered—no offence. There are no realisable outcomes. I have not seen a report from the Ministerial Advisory Council for Multiculturalism, although they are not required to provide an annual report, but some kind of report card on what they have been able to deliver for the community would be really useful to give the multicultural community some guidance on what this peak body is supposed to be doing for them.

That is also not surprising because I recall the way that this government treats the multicultural community. It is more a tokenistic approach to issues facing the multicultural community. I recall a question that I asked the Chief Minister at the last annual reports hearings. I asked him whether it was fair that the multicultural community were required to pay up to \$4,000 to hire a hall, and the response the Chief Minister gave me was that, if a multicultural community had 1,700 people visiting or attending an event, that averaged \$2.30 per person. What that statement misses is that not everybody who attends the event is a member of that community. If we are talking about building social cohesion, then obviously we want to encourage broader Australia and broader Canberra to participate in activities that are put forward by multicultural communities. You cannot ask people who you are inviting to pay for their event. What that statement also misses to identify is that you have to put forward more than one event in a year if you are talking about social cohesion. It shows a lack of understanding of the issues facing the multicultural community, and it shows a complete disdain and disregard for the efforts that the multicultural community puts into this society.

We talk about how wonderful it is, what a multicultural community we live in and what a multicultural society we build, but what are the real efforts put into helping those multicultural communities? What are the problems facing the multicultural community, and how has it been addressed in this statement? I see nothing but words, I see nothing but a tick-box exercise, and I see nothing but just riding on the success that the multicultural community has built themselves, with very little effort from this government.

I thank the minister for the statement, but, sadly, there is absolutely nothing to see here.

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) (12.39), in reply: I would like to rise briefly to respond to some of Ms Barry's remarks about how the Multicultural Festival is coordinated and planned, and some of her observations about this year's festival.

This year's festival was a tremendous success. We are seeing a growth in community interest and involvement in the festival. In 2025, there were 470 applications. In 2026, there were 515 applications. In 2025, 282 of those were accepted. In 2026, 307 of those were accepted. When it comes to performer grants, in 2025 there were 118 applications. In 2026, there were 136. In 2025, 89 of those were accepted. In 2026, 108 of those were accepted. With regard to professional and volunteer performers, in 2025 there were 179 applications. In 2026, there were 262 applications. Of those professional and volunteer performers, in 2025 213 were accepted. In 2026, 248 of those were accepted.

The directorate undertakes a range of activities to try to promote and provide information to support people to make applications. There is an assessment criteria to those applications. As you can tell by the fact that we do not accept every application, there are more applications than we can accept. There is an assessment criteria. They are assessed with these general criteria: alignment with festival aims and values to support and promote multiculturalism, inclusion and participation; variety and uniqueness of offerings to the festival experience; applications submitted on time and completeness of applications, including the stall's self-identified cultural connection, proposed activities and examples of menu items or information being shared at the stall; past participation, noting historical attendance does not guarantee a space; as well as compliance history, where there has been previous festival participation. Priority order is always given to community food and beverage and cultural items, followed by multicultural information and diplomatic missions, community clubs, commercial food and beverage stalls, and general information and market stalls.

I am happy to take on board the general feedback from Ms Barry, where she would like to see more and continued community engagement. I am happy to take that on board. I always like to seek constructive collaboration, so I look forward to engaging with Ms Barry for any helpful suggestions on how we can make this an even better festival for all Canberrans.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Racism and extremist ideologies—update

Ministerial statement

MR PETTERSSON (Yerrabi—Minister for Business, Arts and Creative Industries, Minister for Children, Youth and Families, Minister for Multicultural Affairs and Minister for Skills, Training and Industrial Relations) (12.42): I rise today to provide an update on progress made against recommendations of the racial vilification inquiry of the Tenth Assembly. While it is somewhat uncommon to provide updates on responses to committee inquiries from previous assemblies, this update was sought by the Assembly in September last year. I am happy to provide an update as these matters are of keen interest to me, not only as the Minister for Multicultural Affairs but also because I had the privilege of chairing the committee at the time. As such, I thank

members for their keen interest in these matters and I hope they find this update informative.

This government is invested in ensuring the safety and inclusion of our multicultural community. I reaffirm our unequivocal condemnation of all forms of racism, discrimination and vilification, wherever they occur. These experiences cause real harm. They undermine mental wellbeing, social participation and people's sense of safety and belonging.

The 2022 inquiry made clear that many community members did not feel safe and did not know where to seek support. We heard directly from children experiencing racism in schools, from women abused on public transport, and from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people facing barriers to essential services. A safe society for all is a fundamental principle to equality and social participation. We know there is not a single approach that can successfully eliminate racism and discrimination. We must instead endeavour to implement multifaceted approaches and initiatives that address the root causes of racism and discrimination.

Our response has been clear and ongoing: everyone in Canberra deserves to feel safe, welcome and respected. Regrettably, rates of racism and vilification remain far too high. Our community members still experience racism and abuse from those who refuse to see the benefits that multiculturalism and diversity bring to our society. While most Canberrans celebrate diversity, violence, fear and harm caused by racism and discrimination are real and unacceptable and continue to happen today.

I am pleased that, since the ACT government response to the inquiry in 2023, we have made important progress. We introduced new legislation, the Multiculturalism Act 2023, which established a Ministerial Advisory Council for Multiculturalism. The act put multiculturalism at the forefront of government policy and enshrined our shared commitment to equity, inclusion and respect for Canberra's cultural, linguistic and religious diversity. The ministerial council has worked hard over its term to delve into issues facing the multicultural community, and I thank them for their time and effort. Applications are currently open for membership to the council, and I would encourage the multicultural community to apply. Having a thriving and effective advisory council helps me to understand the issues currently facing our community.

Also in 2023, the government passed the Crimes Legislation Amendment Act 2022, which prohibits the display of Nazi symbols. In 2024, the government amended the Discrimination Act 1991 to strengthen protections against discrimination and promote equality. This included the introduction of a positive duty which requires individuals and organisations to take reasonable and proportionate steps to eliminate discrimination, sexual harassment and unlawful vilification. The positive duty already applies to ACT government directorates and territory authorities, and this will extend to all other ACT organisations and businesses from April 2027. The ACT government has been working closely with directorates on the implementation of the positive duty. Over the next 11 months, engagement with the ACT community will increase to ensure that individuals, businesses and related entities receive appropriate information about the positive duty and fully understand their rights and obligations.

In 2026, we are also working to review and further strengthen hate crimes and anti-

vilification laws in the ACT. Current ACT laws already provide civil and criminal protections against vilification. The review will assess whether these protections are clear, effective and enforceable. It will include whether thresholds for civil and criminal responses are appropriate and whether enforcement could be improved.

We recognise Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people experience racism differently and require tailored responses. That is why we have prioritised funding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community controlled organisations. We have also established the Aboriginal Service Development Branch to build capability across the human services system. The ACT government has also led nationally by legislating commitments under Closing the Gap, with new cultural capability requirements for senior leaders in the public service commencing from July 2026. We thank Mr Emerson for bringing this forward and his collaborative work with the government in this space. Government institutions carry the legacy of colonialism by their very nature, and it must be an ongoing project to make these institutions genuinely responsive to the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, both in the community and for our own staff.

We continue to improve reporting pathways through the ACT Human Rights Commission, making them more accessible and culturally appropriate. We also work closely with the commonwealth and other jurisdictions to strengthen national responses to hate, racism and extremism, including through the National Anti-Racism Framework and countering violent extremism initiatives. As part of this, we have worked with commonwealth, state and territory Attorneys-General through the Standing Council of Attorneys-General to ensure best practice in combating hate crimes and vilification is shared across jurisdictions. We have also worked with the Royal Commission on Antisemitism and Social Cohesion, which was established after the Bondi Beach terror attack. This national inquiry was established to ensure a coordinated national response to strengthen social cohesion, improve responses to antisemitism, and enhance national strategies against ideologically and religiously motivated extremism.

In late April, the royal commission delivered its interim report with 14 recommendations to enhance Australia's counter-terrorism arrangements and capabilities. The report calls for improvements to counter-terrorism capability at Commonwealth and state and territory levels and raises concerns about information management and sharing. The ACT government remains committed to supporting these and other national efforts to ensure a strong and coordinated approach to counter terrorism and strengthening social cohesion.

Racism and discrimination are complex and entrenched issues. There is no single solution. Combating these issues needs transformative change and continued effort and investment to achieve anti-racism policies and measures that evolve with communities' experiences of racism. During this term, I am proud to lead efforts to build a Canberra that is safe and inclusive and where all people are respected, valued, and able to fully participate in community life.

I present the following papers:

Multiculturalism, anti-racism and anti-discrimination frameworks—Assembly resolution of 17 September 2025—Government response—

Report, dated April 2026.

Ministerial statement, 27 May 2026.

I move:

That the Assembly take note of the papers.

Sitting suspended from 12.50 to 2.00 pm.

Questions without notice Canberra Hospital—building defects

MR PARTON: My question is to the Minister for Health. The Canberra Hospital expansion project is yet another example of an ACT government project that has blown out in both time and cost, ballooning an estimated \$160 million over budget, and eventually delivered years behind schedule. When projects are mismanaged at this scale, it inevitably raises serious questions about what corners may have been cut and what problems may now be emerging beneath the surface. Minister, have you been made aware that serious building defects have been identified in Building 5, and are you able to give any details to the Assembly on that matter?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I reject the premise of the Leader of the Opposition's question, as a starting point. This project was actually delivered on budget, and it was delivered in the timeframe that was set once the location had been chosen in 2018. So, it is actually a good example of where Infrastructure Canberra—which was then Major Projects Canberra—has delivered a project in collaboration with clinicians and consumers and with the expert advice of a construction partner, and delivered that project on budget and on time, despite the fact that we were in the middle of a global pandemic for most of that period, where the Canberra Liberals' alternative would have seen a great big hole in the middle of Canberra Hospital, and fewer beds throughout the pandemic.

Anyway, at risk of debating the question, I will go to Mr Parton's actual question. I am aware that, on opening, there were some challenges in relation to some of the drainage inside the Canberra Hospital expansion and Building 5. There were various reasons identified for some of those challenges, and some rectification work was undertaken by the contractor during the period where rectification is undertaken as part of the existing contract.

I know that there have been some issues raised in relation to the helipad. Some of those issues have been quite misrepresented. But there was some work done in relation to the helipad in response to some feedback from the helicopter operators. There are other minor things that always occur when a brand-new building is opened.

MR PARTON: Minister, are you able to provide a list of the defects that have been identified in the critical services building since completion? What has the contractor/builder been required to fix?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I can take on notice a list of all the defects. However, the reason a defect period exists in a construction contract is because there is a recognition

that constructing these types of buildings is a very complex process— particularly for something like a critical services building at a hospital.

These are very complex things to build and it is not always the case that—where clinicians, consumers and experts have been closely involved in design, there is also a difference between looking at the design—even walking through those rooms in a prototype shed of the type that we had—is sometimes different from the way that they are going to be built.

So, in terms of actual defects, I will certainly take the question on notice and be happy to come back to Mr Parton in relation to this standard part of a construction process.

MRS MORRIS: Minister, what was the contracted defect liability period with the builder? Have building defects arisen outside of this period?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I will take the question on notice, Mr Speaker. Thank you.

Crime—Civic

MRS MORRIS: My question is to the Minister for Police, Fire and Emergency Services. In 2023 you said that the success of Canberra’s night-time economy was intrinsically linked to public safety. But business owners and industry witnesses have now told the night-time economy inquiry that families, women and people on their own feel less safe in the city, that police are under resourced, that walking through parts of the city is scary and that people are being deterred from coming to places like Garima Place and Civic. The government’s own City Renewal Authority audit recorded hundreds of antisocial behaviour incidents which caused people to leave or avoid public spaces.

Minister, do you maintain that the success of Canberra’s night-time economy is intrinsically linked to public safety, and if so, why has your government allowed such dangerous and antisocial behaviour to get so out of control?

DR PATERSON: I do continue to say that the success of the night-time economy is linked to public safety, and that is why I am very proud to say that we have one of the safest communities in Australia. Our crime rates have been going down year on year for the past decade.

I spoke to the Chief Police Officer yesterday and looked at the crime rates and the apprehensions and incidents within the Civic centre and Braddon areas, and this year those rates have decreased from the previous year. I think that it is absolutely to do with ACT Policing’s amazing work. They have run multiple operations through our city centre.

Mr Parton interjecting—

DR PATERSON: Mr Parton is butting in to suggest that I talk about our significant investment in ACT Policing numbers—we are at over \$100 million in more ACT police. But, again, public safety is broader than police, and so there has been significant work by the City Renewal Authority—fantastic place-making work.

Our venues in the city centre do amazing things, but the Canberra Liberals and their fearmongering on this are absolutely atrocious.

Opposition members interjecting—

DR PATERSON: If they would actually look at the data about public perceptions of safety, the reporting on government services data nationally suggests that in the ACT, at home at night, walking alone during the day and walking alone at night, ACT residents report the highest rates of perceptions of safety.

MRS MORRIS: Minister, when will your government admit that Labor's decade-long campaign of underinvestment in local policing has made our city less safe?

DR PATERSON: Our city is not less safe. Our city is more safe than ever. And that is testament to the community services that work in our city day in, day out. It is testament to the businesses that work in the city. It is testament to the City Renewal Authority and the level of investment there. It is testament to our ACT police. This is a whole-of-community initiative, and we do have a very safe city centre. It is a centre that is under construction at the moment, and I definitely acknowledge the impact on hospitality and retail businesses in the city centre, but the benefits of the construction there will benefit both the broader Canberra community and those businesses for generations to come.

MR MILLIGAN: Minister, are small business owners and industry groups wrong to publicly warn about safety concerns in Civic?

DR PATERSON: I have met with city groups. I have met with city retailers. We set up multiple different action groups and a taskforce over the past year. Those groups have been working with businesses in the city centre, with government, and so there has been sustained conversations and sustained actions by the government through the city centre and in—

Mr Parton: A point of order on relevance. The question was very specific from Mr Milligan: are the business owners and industry groups wrong to publicly warn about safety concerns in Civic? I do not believe that the minister is being relevant to that question.

MR SPEAKER: She has not explicitly answered it perhaps in the way you might like, but she has certainly been relevant to the issue at hand. She has got some time to go, and she may have further to add. But she is certainly on topic, Mr Parton.

DR PATERSON: We will absolutely continue to work with businesses in our city centre. We will definitely continue to hear any concerns that they have. ACT police are incredibly responsive if there are issues. I think one point that I would like to make, and this is in direct response to some of the work that has been going on, is that ACT police are working with businesses in Garema Place to look to establish a more permanent presence there. So ACT police have listened. The government has listened. We have responded. The crime rates and the apprehensions and incidents within the city centre have reduced.

Mr Parton: A point of order under 118AA: the minister was asked to tell us whether industry groups and business owners were wrong to publicly warn about safety concerns in Civic, and at no point has she addressed that part of the question.

MR SPEAKER: I think she was responsive, Mr Parton. I think that she has not explicitly answered it the way you might want her to, but she was relevant to the issue at hand and she did respond to the question. I accept that she has not perhaps been as explicit and fulsome as you might like, but I think she was consistent with standing orders, so there is no point of order. Next question.

Mr Parton: Thank you, Mr Speaker.

MR SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr Parton.

Public schools—performance

MS LEE: My question is to the Minister for Education and Early Childhood.

Minister, the independent ACT Public School System Resourcing Review found—and I quote:

Although ACT student achievement is often high on raw measures, it compares less favourably with national averages once parental education and socio-economic advantage is considered. Further, even more advantaged ACT students often underperform in NAPLAN against peers of a similar background in NSW and Victoria.

Minister, do you agree with these findings by the independent panel?

MS BERRY: I thank Ms Lee for her continued interest in and support for public education in the ACT. I agree with the work that the expert panel did on reviewing our public school system. It went deep under the bonnet of our public school system to understand where changes need to happen and what reforms need to happen to improve the outcomes for all children. I agree that there is more work to be done, which is why I commissioned the review; it is why the ACT government has agreed to 18 of the 25 recommendations and agreed in principle to seven more. I look forward to implementing those recommendations.

MS LEE: Minister, why have you repeatedly claimed that the ACT has a high-performing education system when this independent review, which you claim that you have commissioned, shows that even our most advantaged students are underperforming compared to their peers interstate?

MS BERRY: The chair of the independent review also said that the ACT public school system is one of the best public school systems in the country, which, of course, I agree with. But we always want to make sure that we improve and do better, so that every student has that same chance to have a great education. I have been very happy to have that work done by the independent review panel and by Professor Ken Smith, in providing advice to the ACT on the way forward.

Ms Lee: A point of order, Mr Speaker. The question that I asked the minister was very straightforward. She is talking at length in general about the actual review and the panel, but she has not actually answered the question directly. So it goes to relevance.

MR SPEAKER: Do you want to remind me of what the specific question was that you asked?

Ms Lee: The specific question was that she has repeatedly claimed, and made a claim, that the ACT is best performing, when this independent review has clearly contradicted that.

MR SPEAKER: In answer to that, she said at the outset that the review had said that it is a well-performing education system. I have not looked at the review to confirm that, but she has been relevant in responding in that way.

MS BARRY: Minister, isn't it true that you ignored the warning signs, dismissed concerns from teachers and parents, and only acted when you were forced to?

MS BERRY: Absolutely not. The review showed that the government is listening, and the review panel did listen to all the stakeholders in this place. This will build on the 10 years of a progressive government supporting and funding its public school system, including providing free Chromebooks, free lunches, the Future of Education Equity Fund and Stronger Foundations, all backed in by the Future of Education Strategy, and now building on a new journey for our public school system and our community, breaking down the autonomy and ensuring that there is consistency and equity across the whole of our public school education system.

Mr Cocks: A point of order under 118AA. I note that the minister has responded based on the actions of the independent review panel, whereas the question itself was: "Isn't it true that you ignored the warning signs, dismissed concerns from teachers and parents, and only acted when you were forced to?"

MR SPEAKER: You asked the question: is it true that you ignored the warning signs? She said, "Absolutely not." So she was explicit in answering the question. You may disagree with her answer, but I think she has been relevant and responsive.

Public schools—occupational violence

MS LEE: My question is to the Minister for Education and Early Childhood. Minister, the independent ACT Public School System Resourcing Review said:

Also concerning to the Panel were reports from schools and stakeholders alike that the current system is not improving safety for staff or students. Incident reports continue to increase, and LSAs assigned to support student's one-to-one were described to the Panel at times as 'bodyguards' or 'punching bags.'

Minister, how could you preside over a system where staff assigned to support students are being described at times as "bodyguards" or "punching bags"?

MS BERRY: I thank Ms Lee for her question and concern for staff and students within

our public education system. I would say that education never stays the same. There are significant changes within our school system have become more apparent, particularly after COVID, where the complexity of students' needs have increased, and schools have responded appropriately. However, the review and the expert panel have provided recommendations that go towards providing better support to schools to manage these kinds of situations through a consistent and more equitable approach. Those are the recommendations that the government has agreed to, and I look forward to implementing them.

MS LEE: Minister, how long have you been aware that staff in your education system feel unsafe at work?

MS BERRY: I have presided over the education portfolio for 10 years, and, after COVID, incidents of violence in our schools increased. Complexity around student behaviour has changed. The need has changed. Complexity and behaviour of our school community have also put some members of our school community at risk. That is not particularly just an education issue; that is a cultural and societal issue that education is part of. We have responded to that with a variety of work and approaches, working closely with teachers, school staff and their unions to implement change. Clearly, we need to do more, and that is what this review has described for us. I take the review recommendations seriously and, as I said, I look forward to working with all stakeholders of our public school system to implement those recommendations.

MR CAIN: Minister, isn't this evidence of a complete failure of your duty of care as education minister?

MS BERRY: No, it is not. It is the education minister listening, implementing a review and then agreeing with the recommendations that the expert panel has provided.

Planning and development—urban growth boundary—Western Edge

MS CLAY: My question is to the Minister for Planning and Sustainable Development. In April last year, this Assembly passed my motion calling for the government to protect the western edge by setting an urban growth boundary this term. Last week I had the privilege of attending a screening of the newly released documentary *On the edge*, produced with the support of the Conservation Council, and a panel discussion which included Ngunnawal emerging elder Selina Walker, who talked about the importance of building housing and the importance of protecting country and First Nations heritage. Minister, how will First Nations custodians be included when deciding where to set the urban growth boundary?

MR STEEL: I thank the member for her question. The question also cuts across Minister Orr's portfolio. Minister Orr is leading the work on developing a nature conservation strategy and a landscape plan, which will address the issue of the establishment of an urban growth boundary for the ACT.

The City and Environment Directorate, of course, has a range of different mechanisms to consult with First Nations people in the ACT around planning and environment issues through the Caring for Country process. We will no doubt be engaging through that process with our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community and more

broadly with the community here in Canberra on the development of these plans, which will of course directly affect their interests, and hopefully protect not only the environmental interests of our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community but also their cultural interests.

I am sure the Heritage Council will also be involved. Of course, they have Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representation. There will be the opportunity for a range of community organisations to put themselves forward to participate in the process of engagement that the government will be undertaking in the development of a landscape plan for the ACT that proactively protects areas of environmental value in the territory in addition to the existing protections that are currently in place through our heritage system for cultural values as well.

MS CLAY: Minister, who is primarily responsible for engaging with First Nations custodians and how will they make sure that the ACT government is truly listening and incorporating First Nations voices and not just presenting a line on a map as a consultation afterthought?

MS ORR: I will jump on this one and have my turn, because it is something that I am working with Minister Steel on in partnership—very much so. There are a number of things that Ms Clay has gone to in her questions. There are the studies that Minister Steel is undertaking looking at environmental values and how those would go for conservation under our environmental laws. With the urban growth boundary, we have made the policy announcement that we will be having as the foundation layer of the new landscape plan critical environmental areas with critical conservation values and that that will be the basis for the urban growth boundary.

Going to Ms Clay's question on the urban growth boundary and how that will be reflected in the landscape plan as to First Nations and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's care for country and want to have their landscape recognised within our work, that is something that we are very conscious of. The Government Landscape Architect is commencing in their position. One of the things I have tasked them with is reaching out to community and having a discussion with community around how they would like to see their landscapes incorporated into the work that we are doing.

Just as a bit of an anecdote and an aside, whenever I talk about the landscape plan, people usually go straight to Burley Griffin and I often say to them, "We actually had people here long before that and they had very important landscapes too, and we have an opportunity through this work through the ACT Landscape Plan to actually reconcile some of that past and make sure that it is reflected in where we go in the future."

We are not jumping ahead to having any pre-determined outcomes, because that would be, I think, disingenuous to having a genuine conversation. We will be looking to work with a range of members of the community. *(Time expired.)*

MISS NUTTALL: Minister, which First Nations people will the government work with?

MS ORR: I will continue on from when my time ran out, because I was actually about to go to that point exactly. I was out on the weekend doing yam daisy planting and a

few others bits with community and, with traditional custodian cultural advisers that we work with at the City and Environment Directorate, we were having a few chats and yarns around how we could approach this work and connect up with the Government Landscape Architect to start to inform that view. Again, its early days with this work, but I can assure the Assembly and anyone who is listening along that there is certainly a very strong intention from government to make sure that our traditional custodians and the landscapes that they value are reflected in the work that we are doing.

Public housing—maintenance

MR EMERSON: My question is to the Minister for Homes, Homelessness and New Suburbs. Eighty-four days ago the ACT Ombudsman reported they were not satisfied Housing ACT was meeting its legislative obligations in response to tenant repair and maintenance requests. A key recommendation from the report was for Housing ACT to establish frameworks to monitor, measure and report on performance for managing maintenance requests and provide assurance it is satisfying its legislative obligations, such as completing non-urgent requests for repairs and maintenance within 28 days, a recommendation which was accepted. Minister, since this report, what action has been taken to ensure non-urgent repairs are being completed within 28 days?

MS BERRY: The advice I have is that non-urgent repairs are happening in the required timeframe and I have been meeting with Housing ACT to understand better the processes to ensure that those KPIs are met. Housing ACT is always striving to meet the needs of our tenants in the appropriate timeframes. There will be some change in that space, particularly as the government moves to insource maintenance across our public housing system. I can take on notice if there is some more detail that I can provide the Assembly and I will bring it back at an appropriate time.

MR EMERSON: Minister, are you aware that there are non-urgent repairs previously raised with Housing ACT, including fixing improperly fitted fly screens and windows that do not open, that are contained in the ombudsman's report published 84 days ago that still have not been addressed?

MS BERRY: I will take that question on notice. I do get correspondence from individuals and from members in this place advocating for individuals. I am just not aware of those specific ones, whether they have been addressed yet, but I will take it on notice and investigate.

MS CARRICK: Minister, have you or your office reached out to the ombudsman for tenants details so you can contact residents to ensure all the maintenance problems raised in the report are resolved?

MS BERRY: No, I do not believe that my office has, but I will take it on notice and check if that is the case from Housing ACT.

Public schools—occupational violence

MS LEE: Mr Speaker, my question is to the minister for education. Minister in your response to the ACT public school system resourcing review you have announced an additional \$9.326 million in funding. How much of this \$9.326 million is going directly

to front line staff?

MS BERRY: As Ms Lee knows because she attended a briefing in my office, that funding is not for implementation of the review recommendations to frontline staff. It is for implementing systems, getting information technology set up, ensuring that we have the appropriate supports. One of the recommendations was on the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander guidance group, making sure that is set up, so that when all those systems are in place, we can have those careful conversations, going forward, to implement the recommendations made in the review.

These recommendations are big recommendations; they are big reforms. They are the first of their kind in over 50 years for the ACT public school system. They will take time to introduce. This is not merely a tick-box exercise. It will require significant buy-in from our school communities, and a significant culture shift from both our schools and our broader community.

We need to make sure that the systems that are set up in the first instance are appropriate, and carefully consider the recommendations before we implement them.

MS LEE: Minister, how much of this \$9.326 million of funding is going to address escalating incidents of violence in our schools?

MS BERRY: I have just responded to what the \$9.326 million funding is going towards. We continue work with the education union—

Ms Lee interjecting—

MS BERRY: Ms Lee, if you would just shh for a moment, I can provide some more information.

That initial investment is to set up systems, so that we can carefully implement—working with all of our stakeholders—this significant reform that the review has recommended for our public school systems.

MR COCKS: Minister, will any of this \$9.326 million, or the systems you are talking about, actually fix the gap between what your officials say and what is actually happening in schools?

MS BERRY: I am responding to the recommendations that have been provided by the expert panel in their review work. This initial funding—which I understand is supported by both Families ACT and the Australian Education Union—is a first step towards a giant reform process in our public education system.

I am happy to work with anybody in this place who wants to see those recommendations implemented, by carefully considering them, working with our stakeholders, and seeing our public education not just be the best in the country but even better than that—and that we are providing the best opportunities for children by supporting our teachers and school principals. That is my goal. It has been my goal for the whole time I have been in this job. I look forward to implementing the recommendations as required.

Fuel security—community service providers

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: My question is to the Minister for Disability, Carers and Community Services. Minister, how is the ACT government engaging with community service providers about fuel supply impacts on the services they provide Canberrans?

MS ORR: Thank you Mr Werner-Gibbings for your question.

Last week I did actually convene an information briefing attended by over 100 representatives of the community service sector here in the ACT. The briefing provided an opportunity for the ACT government—our officials, both from the City and Environment Directorate and the Health and Community Services Directorate—to provide a lot of updates and take questions on the National Fuel Security Plan and the approach the ACT government is taking to securing fuel supply here in the ACT for our Canberra community, as part of the nationally coordinated approach that we are looking at.

It was also an opportunity not just for the community sector to hear about the work that is going on across government but for us to hear from the sector—certainly, we have had a number of individual representations—and to come together with the sector to start to talk about some of the impacts they are seeing, or that they are concerned about, and that they want fed into the scenario planning that we are doing in the event that we do need to progress to higher stages of the plan.

So all in all, it was a really positive discussion; and, certainly, while we continue to not see ongoing impacts to fuel supply to Australia, it is one where the collaboration will put us in good stead should we need to respond further.

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: Minister, why is industry consultation important to the ACT government?

MS ORR: I think this is one where, with the community sector and particularly our community sector partners, we will see a lot of different impacts that sometimes go beyond the things that might initially instantly come to mind. And it is one where, again—while our fuel supply does remain stable—we need to be prepared for any future issues that arise and get that really good understanding of the day-to-day practices of the community sector, where we would see impacts, and feeding that information and detail into our scenario planning.

It will help us to be prepared, should we need to move to restrictions or fuel rationing, and it is also continuing to build that relationship between the sector and between the government so that we have those open lines of communication, should we need to work quite quickly.

MS TOUGH: Minister, following the community information briefing, how will the government communicate with the community sector if circumstances change?

MS ORR: This was one of the outcomes of the briefing that we had. We provided more information on how you can contact our new procurement and grants hub, which we have stood up within the HCS Directorate to be that initial point of contact and that

constant point of contact for our community sector—so raising awareness of that and letting people know that they can get in contact with that area as an initial point and one point of contact with government. There are also contact points with contract managers. And also, working with our peak sector bodies, we had presentations, as well, during the briefing, from ACTCOSS and from National Disability Services raising that there are places that you go and different contact points that you can go to get information.

We are also looking at how we can continue to have that joined-up response, particularly working with the peaks, and keeping that regular information communication coming in. We will also look to do further updates and information as required through our newsletters. And, certainly, if circumstances change significantly, we would look to moving to further direct communication and information briefings on a more regular basis.

Deputy Chief Minister—conduct

MS LEE: My question is to the Chief Minister. Chief Minister, for years your education minister ignored the evidence of experts, teachers and families about declining literacy and numeracy outcomes in ACT government schools and only acted after the Canberra Liberals forced an independent review. We now have the independent ACT Public School System Resourcing Review, which has revealed that this minister has presided over deep and systemic failures within the ACT education system. Chief Minister, given that the same education minister is also embroiled in a current Integrity Commission investigation into serious corruption allegations, what does it take for you to sack her?

MR BARR: I thank Ms Lee for that long diatribe of a question that is based in an alternate reality, really. So I reject the premise of the question. I have full confidence in the Deputy Chief Minister's work, and I particularly applaud her work in the education portfolio over a decade, where she has been focused on wanting to enhance equity in our education system, and very eloquently outlined the range of measures that she has put in place whilst minister to achieve that end.

MS LEE: Chief Minister, given that the long list of failures of this education minister go well beyond including school maintenance, lack of support for students learning with disabilities, and the fact that she is overseeing nine months of no response to industrial action, do you still retain confidence in the education minister?

MR BARR: Yes, and I refer the member to my answer to the previous question.

MR PARTON: Chief Minister, are you prepared to go down with your education minister?

MR BARR: I reject the premise of the opposition leader's question. I know the Canberra Liberals are very experienced in going down. We have seen quite a few of you take that particular path. In politics, there are snakes and ladders, Mr Speaker—

Mr Cocks: A point of order. I think the Chief Minister may be debating this point.

MR SPEAKER: If you are going to ask a question like, "Are you going to go down with your minister?" you are inviting a response, Mr Cocks, so we will allow a little bit

of latitude, if you are going to ask questions like that. I think he has concluded his answer. We will move on to a new question.

Public schools—senior secondary language courses

MR BRADDOCK: My question is to the Minister for Multicultural Affairs. Minister, community language schools are highly upset by what appears to be a significant decrease in funding and support for community language schools, following on from, in quick succession, CIT Solutions closing down and the Education Directorate not seeking to replace this language training for public school students.

Minister, why is government support for community language training decreasing when language training is diminishing across the ACT?

MR PETTERSSON: I thank Mr Braddock for the question and his long and continued advocacy for community language schools and language in general. I want to speak to the specifics of CIT Solutions and secondary school language education. I think the specifics of community language schools have been well canvassed in this place. I have received a large number of representations, both from community language schools and from the peak association, the CLSA, as to how the arrangements for funding of community language schools has been operating.

Following those representations, I sought a review to be undertaken that would engage and consult with all stakeholders. That review has been undertaken and, as informed, there were some draft guidelines. We then went back to the same people we consulted with to seek their views as to the appropriateness of any proposed changes and funding of that potential program. I look forward to the continued engagement of all stakeholders in this space. It is clear to me that everyone is passionate and wants to see language celebrated. It is about making sure the government can continue to do that in the best way possible.

Senior secondary language courses—order to table document

MR BRADDOCK: Mr Speaker, under standing order 213, I move:

That, in accordance with standing order 213A, the Assembly orders the Minister for Multicultural Affairs to provide to the Assembly a copy of the review.

Debate (on motion by **Ms Stephen-Smith**) adjourned to a later hour.

Questions without notice

Public schools—senior secondary language courses

MR BRADDOCK: Minister, why are schools facing a future where they receive less funding? And how is this meant to cover their rising costs—in particular, public liability insurance?

MR PETTERSSON: I thank Mr Braddock for the question. One component that I think underlies Mr Braddock's question, but not all of it, is how funding is allocated to different schools. As it currently operates, there is flat funding per student. One of the

proposals is that funding would scale, based on the size of the school, which would see students at smaller schools receiving a greater amount of funding than students at larger schools.

MISS NUTTALL: Minister, why are preschools and play groups no longer eligible, given this is the ideal age in which to learn a new language?

MR PETTERSSON: I thank Miss Nuttall for the question. These are proposed guidelines. Decisions have not been made. We are genuinely seeking feedback on the work that has been undertaken. I understand that consultation closed on Friday. I have received some of that feedback already. Many very useful suggestions and points have been raised. I look forward to considering those and continuing to work with all stakeholders in this space to ensure that the funding arrangements we have in place deliver a really good outcome.

Lakes and waterways—water quality

MISS NUTTALL: My question is to the Minister for Climate Change, Environment, Energy and Water. Minister, thank you for your update yesterday on the Water quality—Lakes and Waterways—Improvement Assembly resolution of 28 October 2025. There was a lot of helpful detail in this statement and I would like to ask about a couple of aspects. It is fantastic that your tabled paper speaks so highly of the Healthy Waterways Program, which was implemented under former Minister Rattenbury when he was Minister for Water. Where next for the Healthy Waterways Program? Will it continue under this Labor government or is it finished now?

MS ORR: Certainly with the Healthy Waterways Program we continue to work on the next iteration of programs and approaches to improving our water quality across our catchments. I believe I am on the record as saying that we have been publicly consulting on the next plan for Lake Tuggeranong. That one is part of the Healthy Waterways Program and one that we look to be coming out shortly. We have finished consultation and have been finalising the strategy for the next 10 years on a healthier Lake Tuggeranong. Following our cabinet processes, we will come out with a plan for that. We will then—and I believe this has been flagged in estimates discussions previously—look to catchments across our region to make sure that we are putting in place longer-term planning to consistently improve the water quality within our catchment system.

Miss Nuttall has quite often asked about specific projects that would have been covered under previous iterations of the Health Waterways Program that really go to infrastructure. We will continue to look at infrastructure, but what we have learnt from those earlier iterations of the Healthy Waterways Program is that, while we can put in infrastructure that will clean water that is going to our catchments, a much bigger focus on preventing pollutants from getting into our system in the first place is needed within our programs. That is what we are looking at doing as we work through this next range of updating our responses to improving Canberra's water quality.

MISS NUTTALL: Minister, would you revisit the renaturalisation of Sullivans Creek as part of your ongoing work on specific lakes and waterways, given the merits that led to initial planning work back in 2023?

MS ORR: I note that the renaturalisation of many of our waterways has been a topic of interest in the chamber in this term of government and also the previous. I am on the record as saying that we are not looking to renaturalise Sullivans Creek. It is not government policy. We do have the options paper that was put forward, and certainly where we are doing work within that catchment area and we can build on the recommendations that were made in that report, we will look to incorporate it.

I would note—and it is not just Sullivans Creek; there is also Yarralumla Creek and other creeks where everyone has said, “Please, come and look at this”—that there are different components to this. Water quality is not necessarily the only factor to consider. We also look at the health of waterways from a cultural perspective and making sure that the waterways, particularly those that have been turned into drainage systems, are brought back to what they would have been in their original form. That is actually a very important part of Sullivans Creek and other projects we talk about. We also look at the environmental factors of just having a much healthier ecosystem.

There is also consideration of the issue of planning risk. There is a reality within our water system that concrete drains that we see across our city were made to move water out of the area to enable people to build homes and other development in the surrounding area. One of the challenges we have, and one of the balancing factors we need to consider, is that, in renaturalising these creeks, it will lead to more localised pooling of water in heavy rain events. With climate change, we are seeing more and more of those, and the options for us to renaturalise are going to be far more case-by-case and discrete projects rather than looking at, I guess, doing everything all at once. These are the things that we need to manage, and we are building all of those considerations into our ongoing programs.

MR BRADDOCK: Minister, when will you develop the Lake Ginninderra plan, which includes Yerrabi Pond?

MS ORR: The next focus I believe we will taking is on Lake Burley Griffin. We do have a timeline for all of the plans. I do not have it in front of me, so I will come back to Mr Braddock with the indicative timeframes for the next tranche of work on the plans.

Planning and development—Manuka

MS CARRICK: My question is to the Minister for Planning and Sustainable Development and it is about the Manuka hotel.

Minister, the redevelopment of the Manuka hotel site has raised serious community concerns regarding compliance with approved planning expectations and the apparent absence of key public amenities, most notably the cinemas that were widely understood to form part of the original vision and were indeed part of the DA. This raises broader questions about oversight, accountability and the integrity of the planning process in the ACT. Minister, why did the Access Canberra compliance team fail to identify the omission of the promised cinemas during construction and why was the developer not required to rectify this before completion?

MR STEEL: I thank the member for her question. I will seek some advice from the

independent regulator and come back to the Assembly.

MS CARRICK: Minister, will the ACT Planning Authority consider or approve a retrospective development application that excludes cinemas, despite earlier expectations or representations that they would be delivered?

MR STEEL: I will seek advice from the chief planner in relation to that matter and come back to the Assembly on notice.

MR EMERSON: Minister, what is the purpose of the ACT planning and approvals process if key elements of a development can be altered or omitted like this without transparent review or enforcement?

MR STEEL: I thank the member for his question. Of course, we do have existing enforcement mechanisms under the Planning Act, and I have also set out the wish to review some of those enforcement mechanisms and the penalties that may be applied for contraventions of the Planning Act. That will get underway over the next year and it will be an opportunity to see whether further improvements can be made to the regulatory powers available to the independent agency, Access Canberra, who acts as a delegate for the independent Territory Planning Authority in enforcing provisions under the Planning Act. We do want to make sure that we continue to strengthen the Planning Act to make sure there is continued integrity in the planning system, particularly around development applications, but I do not want to comment specifically in relation to this matter before providing further advice to the Assembly on the current situation.

Budget—debt

MR COCKS: My question is to the Chief Minister.

Chief Minister, independent economist Saul Eslake's review of the fiscal sustainability of the ACT highlighted that operating deficits essentially represent a failure to pay for today's costs and services, because any long-term infrastructure—indeed, any infrastructure—is effectively excluded from the operating balance. Chief Minister, what was the cumulative total of operating deficits you accrued during your tenure as Treasurer?

MR BARR: I will take that question on notice, as it relates to the headline net operating balance.

MR COCKS: Chief Minister, how long will it take for the amount of debt that you accrued for operating deficits to be paid off, if the budget continues with the average cash balances predicted in your government's current budget?

MR BARR: Of course, the budget position will change from year to year, based on a range of variables including revenues and expenditures and infrastructure decisions.

Mr Parton: I think the answer is, "Never."

MR BARR: Mr Cocks's question is largely hypothetical, inviting me to speculate on future government policy but—

Mr Cocks: Kind of like the forward estimates.

MR BARR: I would make the observation that once the territory has fully funded its superannuation liability then around five per cent of the annual operating budget is freed up, in order to meet either future infrastructure requirements or debt repayment.

The territory has been on a long journey to fully fund that significant liability that was shoved to us by the commonwealth upon self-government, and completion of that task is an important metric that we have been working towards. It will have a significant impact on the territory's fiscal capacity once that liability is fully funded. We are now within sight of that. Twenty years ago, we were three decades away.

MRS MORRIS: Chief Minister, do you accept any responsibility for handing future generations and young Canberrans billions of dollars in debt, with no plan to pay it off?

MR BARR: We do have a plan to pay it off, and I have just outlined part of that.

I am also happy to accept responsibility for the delivery of infrastructure that this community needs now, and that those future generations will enjoy. Examples of that can go as far as building the Cotter dam, which services this community for more than a century—

Mr Cocks interjecting—

MR BARR: It goes to the investment in hospitals, it goes to the investment in education, in schools and TAFE facilities—

Mrs Morris: You are just making future generations pay for it all.

MR BARR: Future generations are going to use the asset. We are utilising and paying for, now, infrastructure that was build 30 or 40 years ago and was financed by debt. Governments are not like households. Governments do not retire. Governments continue. Governments need to build assets for multiple generations—

Mr Parton: I think they might retire eventually!

MR BARR: for decades into the future. Government—ACT government—will continue, I would hope. Whilst ever there are humans alive in this city there will be an ACT government, is my hope. And that government will be charged not only with meeting current responsibilities but also planning for the future.

Debt-financed infrastructure is the way every government in the world funds long term infrastructure projects. It is a sensible way to do so because it does spread the cost of an asset that will be utilised for 50 or 100 years—over more than one generation.

Members interjecting—

MR BARR: A practical example of using the Liberal party's ideology would be that you would have to pay in cash in advance for every asset you bought. I am sure each

one of you have had a mortgage at some part of your life; when you have borrowed for an asset, being housing, and you have paid it off over time.

Members interjecting—

MR BARR: This, Mr Speaker, is not an unusual practice for governments, or, indeed, households, and it is an entirely reasonable way to fund long term infrastructure.

Budget—transport

MR COCKS: My question is to the Minister for Transport. Minister, in looking at the current-year budget, the final independent report on the fiscal sustainability of the ACT observes that the current forward estimates incorporate declines in projected transport spending. Which transport programs or services does the 2025-26 budget assume will cease or be cut to achieve those reductions?

MR STEEL: We are continuing to invest in our transport system, both buses and light rail, and we will have more to say in the 2026-27 budget when I hand it down. Of course, we continue to make progress against our commitments in relation to delivering stage 2A of light rail and stage 2B. The flexible bus service is, I guess, one example where we have funded it for a year whilst there is an evaluation of the program, and then we will consider future funding beyond that year based on that evaluation. So there will be programs that are not funded beyond one year, in order to undertake reviews; that is common. And then we will, of course, make decisions in future budgets around continued funding for those and improvements to those services.

We will continue to deliver our bus system, and, indeed, on 20 July, we will be increasing the frequency of services, particularly on some of the higher capacity routes—the R4, R5 and R6 services—and returning services to their previous routes in Belconnen on the R2 and R3 routes as well. We will continue to invest in that while recruiting more staff and delivering on our election commitments. We will do that over a number of budgets, and that will be outlined in those budgets.

Mr Cocks: A point of order, Mr Speaker, under 118AA. The question was about the projected declines in transport spending over the forward estimates, and the specific question was: which transport programs or services does the current-year, 2025-26, budget, assume will cease or be cut to achieve those reductions. The minister has spoken about his aspirations for spending more. He has not addressed those reductions

MR SPEAKER: On the point of order?

Mr Steel: On the point of order—I have actually specifically mentioned an example of a program that has been funded for one year.

MR SPEAKER: I think what the minister has outlined is the fact that it might look like there is a decline because some are funded for a year pending a review, and there will also be additional budget decisions—

Mr Cocks: He hasn't said which.

MR SPEAKER: So I think he has been relevant and responsive. He might not have given you the exact answer you wanted Mr Cocks, but he has been responsive under the standing orders. Mr Cocks, do you have a supplementary?

MR COCKS: Minister, do the forward estimates assume any reduction in bus service kilometres, frequency, reliability or staffing?

MR STEEL: I do not believe they do. We will continue to deliver a reliable, frequent bus service for Canberrans. As I outlined in the answer to the previous question, we are actually increasing the frequency based on the savings that we have found in the network, based on real world conditions on our road network with the construction of the Commonwealth Avenue Bridge. So we will continue to deliver bus services using the full complement of buses and recruiting more drivers to make sure that we can service the community. And, of course, we have got further election commitments which we will be delivering over the term to improve services even further.

MR PARTON: Minister, why do Canberrans continue to suffer because of your government's financial mismanagement, despite your deadpan stand-up comedy routine here in the chamber?

Ms Berry: A point of order. I seek your guidance, Mr Speaker, on the language that Mr Parton used to describe Minister Steel's answers to questions in this place and whether that was parliamentary.

MR SPEAKER: I will get some advice. I think it is certainly verging on irony, which is not allowed under the standing orders. I will hear what the Clerk's advice is.

We are going with "imputation", Mr Parton: so, it could be ironic; it could be an imputation; it could be an inference. I once sought advice from the Clerk and he said, "You'll know it when you hear it, when those matters come up." And I think I recognise it when I hear it. So I will say that the question is out of order because of the way it was asked—you want to talk about stand-up comedy routines and so on. It was not a legitimate question. That being the case, new questions.

Youth—homelessness—Woden Youth Foyer

MS TOUGH: My question is to the Minister for Homes, Homelessness and New Suburbs. Minister, with the Woden Youth Foyer officially opening on 4 May 2026, can you please detail why this is such an exciting achievement for the ACT government, and what benefit will this foyer have for residents?

MS BERRY: I thank Ms Tough for her question. The Woden Youth Foyer is the first one of its kind in Canberra. Woden is Education's first youth foyer that aims to transform the lives of young people who are transitioning into adulthood.

Opposition members interjecting—

MS BERRY: The Youth Foyer is for young people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness and are engaged with education. Young people can stay at the foyer for up to two years and, during this time, are supported to build their independence and

resilience. The ACT government committed to build the Woden Youth Foyer, and they received \$10 million towards the cost of the construction from the federal government's Priority Community Infrastructure Program.

I am excited to have visited the first Education Youth Foyer in Canberra, and I look forward to seeing young Canberrans find their independence and break that cycle of homelessness.

MS TOUGH: Minister, which Canberrans will be supported by the Woden Youth Foyer?

MS BERRY: I thank Ms Tough for the supplementary. The foyer will support young people aged between 16 and 24, and it has 20 self-contained apartments. There are three rooms designed for young parents, with facilities to accommodate children, as well as two fully accessible rooms. The whole foyer has been built to class C adaptable standard, so that future modifications can be made to suit residents' physical needs as required.

The foyer is truly a remarkable home for vulnerable young Canberrans, with dedicated spaces to help them grow and gain the skills that they need to support themselves once they leave the foyer.

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: Minister, how many other youth foyers are there in Canberra?

MS BERRY: Thank you, Mr Werner-Gibbings. We have one other youth foyer, known as Our Place. Barnardos manages the Our Place program, which supports up to 24 young people in Braddon. On Monday, the ACT government announced that funding has been allocated for the youth foyer at Braddon over four years, for the continued operation of Our Place.

Our youth foyers are vital in helping young Canberrans get into safe housing and break the cycle of homelessness. I look forward to working with them to see successful outcomes for these young people.

Canberra Health Services—occupational violence

MR PARTON: My question is to the Minister for Health. Minister, in the space of a fortnight last month, we learnt from the media, and not from you, that there had been a series of serious and violent assaults on frontline health staff at Canberra Hospital. Minister, do you accept this as clear evidence of a health system under strain and a government that is losing control of the most important public service?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I thank the Leader of the Opposition for the question. The health system is under strain, and that is why, in last year's budget, we invested an additional \$1.1 billion to support the ACT public health system. Our staff do an incredible job in sometimes difficult circumstances. But it is a very long bow to draw between that and the specific instances of occupational violence that have been talked about recently regarding the Behavioural Assessment Unit. In both of these instances, we are talking about people with significant disordered behaviour and quite different

circumstances. That is my understanding. The incidents themselves are quite different. I need to be clear, as I have been on many occasions, that any instance of occupational violence across our health services is unacceptable. That is why we have had a range of occupational violence strategies over many years in our health services. That process has been refreshed now and new work is underway, which we will no doubt discuss in relation to Mr Parton's motion, which he seems to be pre-empting with this question today.

MR PARTON: Minister, how can healthcare workers have confidence that their workplace is safe when repeatedly raising critical workplace safety concerns are not being actioned?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: If Mr Parton, the Leader of the Opposition, has specific examples of where staff believe that concerns that they have raised have not been actioned, I am very much interested in hearing about those. We take incidents of occupational violence, whether that is physical violence, verbal abuse or whatever it might look like, very seriously. Canberra Health Services has, for example, supported staff to take out workplace protection orders against consumers who are known to behave in unacceptable ways towards our staff and from whom our staff feel threatened. We have the Nurses and Midwives: Towards a Safer Culture strategy. Two iterations of that strategy have rolled out Safewards across all of our hospitals, reducing instances of occupational violence and restraint of patients. It builds that understanding and prevents escalation of violent situations.

We have posters right across our health services that were co-designed with our staff, reminding consumers and families that our healthcare workers are also family members and people in our community with interests, and that violence and aggression is not acceptable in our services. We have ongoing training in relation to the de-escalation of people whose behaviour is heightened, not just for our professional health staff but also for our wards people and our security staff. So there are a lot of things in place. Can we do better? Of course. We always have more to learn and more to do, and that is why we are getting on with that work.

MRS MORRIS: Minister, at what point do repeated operational failures become a question of ministerial competency?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I reject the premise of Mrs Morris's question. There is no evidence that this is the case. I take these issues very seriously and I have in the entire time that I have been health minister and in the period since the last election, where I have been Minister for Mental Health as well.

Mr Barr: I think it is time, Mr Speaker; all further questions can be placed on the notice paper.

Supplementary answers to questions without notice

Lakes and waterways—water quality

MS ORR: In regard to the question that I took on notice from Mr Braddock, around further information on the timing of future Healthy Waterways plans, as I said in my answer, Lake Burley Griffin will be our next focus. We are currently working on that,

and preparatory work, in putting together modelling to inform a new plan that we will be looking to bring out towards the latter half of 2027 for public consultation. With respect to other catchments, certainly, we will continue to work through those. We are still working through the actual timing, depending on how we work through the ones we have underway, which is Lake Tuggeranong, and the next intended one is Lake Burley Griffin.

Public schools—senior secondary language courses

MR PETTERSSON: In a question from Mr Braddock about community language schools, I said consultation closed on Friday. It was actually Monday, 25 May.

Whistleblower protections

MR EMERSON (Kurrajong) (3.07): I move:

That this Assembly:

- (1) notes that:
 - (a) whistleblowers improve transparency and accountability in public institutions and are essential for a healthy and functional democracy;
 - (b) whistleblowing frameworks must be designed to encourage and support whistleblowers to come forward;
 - (c) the *Public Interest Disclosure Act 1994* (PID Act) made the ACT one of the first jurisdictions in the world to introduce dedicated whistleblower protection laws;
 - (d) since this legislation was updated in 2012, Australian and international whistleblowing standards and best practice have evolved considerably and the ACT's whistleblowing framework is no longer considered world-leading;
 - (e) the ACT Government reviewed the PID Act in 2023, and in June 2024, the ACT Government committed to providing a more substantive and considered response to the review's recommendations during the Eleventh Assembly, but is yet to do so; and
 - (f) whistleblowers continue to play a critical role in exposing issues in public administration in the ACT, including recently in relation to the treatment of First Nations ACT public servants and the governance of the Canberra Institute of Technology;
- (2) further notes that:
 - (a) the South Australian Court of Appeal applied a narrow interpretation of whistleblowing protections in *Boyle v DPP (Cwth)* [2024] SASCA 73, resulting in the prosecution of Richard Boyle for exposing unethical debt recovery practices at the Australian Taxation Office;
 - (b) following the Boyle case, the Federal and Queensland Governments both indicated they are considering expanding the scope of protections for whistleblowers;
 - (i) in February 2025, Federal independent crossbenchers Andrew Wilkie, Helen Haines, David Pocock and Jacqui Lambie introduced the Whistleblower Protection Authority Bill 2025 (No. 2), seeking

- to establish an independent Whistleblower Protection Authority;
and
- (ii) the Federal Government subsequently released a consultation draft of the Public Interest Disclosure and Other Legislation Amendment (Whistleblower Protections) Bill 2025, which proposes to:
 - (A) establish a new dedicated Whistleblower Ombudsman within the Office of the Commonwealth Ombudsman;
 - (B) clarify and strengthen protections and supports for whistleblowers; and
 - (C) ensure that whistleblowing rights, obligations and procedures are clear and accessible;
 - (c) in 2024, the NSW Government established a whistleblower support function within the NSW Ombudsman, piloting legal and wellbeing referral programs in addition to its casework function, to embed a positive “speak up” culture for public servants; and
 - (d) the Queensland Government has indicated it is considering piloting a whistleblower legal support funding scheme; and
- (3) calls on the Government to:
- (a) ensure clear guidance and educational materials on whistleblowing pathways and processes are made available and distributed across the ACT public sector;
 - (b) embed a whistleblower support function in the ACT Integrity Commission, Ombudsman, Human Rights Commission or the Office of the Public Sector Standards Commissioner, including a pilot for legal and wellbeing support for whistleblowers; and
 - (c) provide an update on its progress and expected timelines toward implementing the recommendations from the 2023 PID Act review and report back on options, expected funding requirements and timelines for implementation of the whistleblower support function by the last sitting week of 2026.

Before speaking to the motion, I seek leave to table four documents that are relevant to the motion.

Leave granted.

MR EMERSON: I present the following documents:

Public Interest Disclosure—

Work health and safety concerns for ACT Government Aboriginal staff—

Letter to Members of the ACT Legislative Assembly from Mr Brendan Moyle, dated 16 May 2026.

Copy of email to the ACT Head of Service from the Executive Branch Manager, Office of ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, Community Services Directorate, dated 4 August 2025.

CIT Electric Vehicle Training Program—Safety, compliance and governance concerns—

Statement from a whistleblower, undated.

Copy of email to CIT CEO from a whistleblower, dated 9 January 2026.

I also seek leave to move that the documents be authorised for publication.

MR SPEAKER: Is leave granted? They have not seen the documents. Leave is not granted.

MR EMERSON: I will go to my remarks. When the ACT passed its public interest disclosure legislation in 1994, we became one of the first jurisdictions in the world to introduce dedicated whistleblower protection laws. In doing so, we recognised that democracy depends not only on ballot papers and elections, but also on telling the truth, on scrutiny, on transparency and on accountability. We recognised that public servants who take the immense personal risk of exposing corruption, maladministration, abuse of power and unethical conduct within government institutions are guardians of the public interest, and that it is in all our interests for them to be supported and protected, not silenced and prosecuted.

In the ACT, we pride ourselves on being a stalwart for progressive, human rights-based policies. We celebrate being a jurisdiction that is willing to lead with courage, and so we should. The ACT has proudly led the nation on a number of fronts. We were the first to legislate for marriage equality, the first to introduce free pill testing, and the only jurisdiction in the country to support an Indigenous Voice to Parliament. Time and time again, our territory has shown that progressive reform is not something to fear; it is something to be proud of.

But when it comes to whistleblower protections, we are no longer leading. Since our Public Interest Disclosure Act was last substantially updated in 2012, the world has changed. Best practice has evolved. Whistleblowers have been punished. Other jurisdictions have strengthened their protections. International standards have advanced. Meanwhile, the ACT has stood still. When governments stand still on integrity, public trust moves backward.

Four years ago, the ACT government acknowledged the need for reform in this area when it commissioned Mr Ian Govey AM to conduct a review of the ACT's whistleblower laws. That review delivered 39 recommendations back in 2023—39 practical recommendations to modernise our Public Interest Disclosure Act, improve accountability, and better support people who come forward to expose wrongdoing. The government noted all 39 recommendations and committed in its response to providing a more detailed and considered response to the PID Act review during the Eleventh Legislative Assembly, but we have heard nothing further on that front.

In April last year, I wrote to the government seeking an update on implementation timeframes and making clear my eagerness to work collaboratively on reform. The response I received indicated only that the government was “continuing to consider the recommendations, including through the budget process”. Yet here we are, two budget processes later, and we are yet to see any budget announcements focused on strengthening our whistleblower framework, which is why I am calling in this motion

for the government to provide a timeline for implementing the recommendations of the Govey review.

This motion is not only about legislative reform; it is also about creating a culture in which speaking up is encouraged and supported, not punished. I am calling for the ACT government to do so by establishing a dedicated whistleblower support function within the office of an appropriate statutory authority, because statutory protections alone are not enough. Public sector workers need to be made aware of the protections available to them and be supported to engage them. Whistleblowing can be isolating. It can be traumatic, and it can put people in an incredibly vulnerable position, both professionally and personally.

In 2024, the New South Wales government established a dedicated whistleblower support team within the New South Wales Ombudsman’s office. That service provides legal assistance, wellbeing support and practical casework management for public servants navigating incredibly stressful and challenging circumstances. My office has spoken with the New South Wales Ombudsman’s office about how it works, and we have discussed organising a briefing with them for any members and their staff who might be interested.

I have also met with a New South Wales whistleblower who has used this service. They shared with me the sense of security that the service provided, and how it empowered them to make informed and supported choices to speak up. That is what I hope we can achieve here in the ACT.

The documents that I tabled at the beginning of this speech include two public interest disclosures made by ACT public sector employees, accompanied by statements from the whistleblowers who made them. These documents contain a public interest disclosure from a Canberra Institute of Technology employee, alleging that CIT’s Electric Vehicle Centre of Excellence has been training unqualified students using private hire cars from companies like Hertz, pulling elements apart and putting them back together, without telling the hire car companies. There was no procurement process, no testing and tagging, and no safety assurance. The electric vehicles were invoiced as “travel expenses” and the hire car company was never advised that their vehicles had been used for mechanical training, high-voltage battery work, and de-powering and re-powering.

This practice, the whistleblower states, has been approved by CIT management, despite posing “significant risk of injury or death to staff, students and the general public” with “electric vehicles that have been worked on by unqualified students being unknowingly hired and driven by members of the public”. CIT has done this both in the ACT and when delivering courses interstate.

The whistleblower made their formal public interest disclosure—which I have tabled—to the CEO of CIT, Dr Margot McNeill, in January this year, after the concerns had been raised through internal reporting channels throughout 2025, including appropriate escalation to management, with no response.

What happened when the whistleblower wrote to the CEO? Nothing. The unsafe activities continued. There was no effective investigation or enforcement action, no

known referral to the Integrity Commission, and no acknowledgment that the whistleblower's disclosure had even been formally recognised as a public interest disclosure, as required by law. Nothing happened, despite their disclosure referring to fraudulent procurement, maladministration of public funds, governance failures and noncompliance with workplace safety and training obligations. So the whistleblower brought their concerns to my office.

It is worth noting here that CIT's EV Centre of Excellence program is jointly funded by the ACT and commonwealth governments and was celebrated as the first centre of excellence to be established in Australia. Of course, it is also worth noting that the PID lodged by the whistleblower went to the same CEO who has been found by a committee of this Assembly to have actively misled her board in relation to a misconduct finding made against her by TAFE New South Wales.

With that said, I strongly encourage members to read the PID and accompanying statement, wherein the whistleblower indicates that this is not an isolated incident; rather, that "there is an endemic culture within CIT of silence, of turning a blind eye to poor or unsafe practices, and of disdain towards those who raise concerns or question practices". The whistleblower continues:

Staff have been instructed not to openly discuss these work health and safety breaches. Many executives believe and act as though they are accountable to nobody.

The second PID in the statement I have tabled is from the former head of the ACT Office of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, Mr Brendan Moyle. Last year, in a public interest disclosure to the head of the ACT public service, Brendan Moyle, a senior Aboriginal public servant, raised serious concerns about his treatment and that of the Office for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, about systemic racism and discrimination in the ACTPS, and about the ACT government's failure to deliver on its commitments to First Nations people.

In the correspondence, he alleges, with supporting evidence, that the ACT public service is guilty of maladministration under the PID Act, noncompliance with the Integrity Commission Act, noncompliance with the Human Rights Act, noncompliance with the Discrimination Act, noncompliance with the Public Sector Management Act, and noncompliance with the Work Health and Safety Act.

For more than two years before making this formal whistleblower report to the Head of Service in August 2025, Mr Moyle repeatedly raised and escalated issues about the ACT government's inaction on its commitments under the ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Agreement, the National Agreement on Closing the Gap, and several other government commitments agreed by cabinet, to improve life outcomes for First Nations people in the ACT. He worked through multiple risk assessments identifying extreme and escalating risks with respect to the ACT government's failure to deliver on its commitments, and the catastrophic risk to the ACTPS with the immense psychosocial harm this failure was causing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff in his team. In his public interest disclosure, Mr Moyle states:

The impact of these issues on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff is that serious that I am undertaking First Nations suicide prevention training on 21

August 2025, so I can do what I can to prevent a repeat incident that I have been advised of where a senior Aboriginal staff member from another directorate committed suicide. I am escalating these concerns through this process noting this risk. I am only coming to you in this context because I feel I have no other option and the risks to all of us are increasing.

After sending this PID, Mr Moyle sent further lengthy briefs up the chain detailing ongoing issues the following month, in September 2025, and again in October, before resigning from his role in frustration in November 2025. His resignation letter again lays out his concerns in detail. Despite over 2½ years of persistent reports, risk assessments, complaints and grave allegations, Mr Moyle's concerns were only taken seriously in March 2026, on the day they were made public through media reporting on Mr Moyle's response to a trove of documents that were released through a freedom of information request that I lodged.

In March 2026, the Head of Service asked the Public Sector Standards Commissioner to investigate Mr Moyle's allegations, on the day they became public—a full seven months after Mr Moyle sent his public interest disclosure to Ms Leigh, the Head of Service, about those exact allegations. In the statement that I have tabled alongside Mr Moyle's PID, he rightly asks:

Why did it take the directorate publishing documents for the freedom of information request, and then the subsequent media, for this matter to be taken seriously, noting that there are over 500 pages of evidence? Where were the protections? And just as importantly, where is the accountability?

I hope members will take the time to read through Mr Moyle's accompanying statement to understand the impact this ordeal has had on him and his family. On that point, I propose to move for the suspension of standing orders.

MR ASSISTANT SPEAKER (Mr Cain): It is my understanding that the documents are being circulated. Do you want to wait until that has happened?

MR EMERSON: Is that necessary? I think it is in the public interest.

MR ASSISTANT SPEAKER: We can continue with the debate; then we can come back, once these have been circulated. You can seek leave, once members have had a look at them. You can pursue what you are seeking, to suspend standing orders, or you can wait for the circulation. What would you like to do?

MR EMERSON: I am happy to do it later.

MR ASSISTANT SPEAKER: The debate on your motion continues, and the question is that the motion be agreed to.

MR EMERSON: I have a little bit of time left, I think.

MR ASSISTANT SPEAKER: Mr Emerson, you have about six minutes left.

MR EMERSON: Thank you, Mr Assistant Speaker. I want to acknowledge both whistleblowers, whose disclosures and statements I have tabled today, for doing the

right thing and blowing the whistle, for their courage and resilience in being willing to speak out, and for entrusting me to bring their concerns and their experiences to the Assembly.

These public interest disclosures needed to be tabled in this place, and I would strongly urge members to support their publication, in the public interest, in the interest of transparency, and in the interest of demonstrating that this Assembly will share those concerns that have not been escalated and actioned appropriately internally when they are brought to members of this place.

In both instances, the whistleblower followed all the appropriate processes. They have raised concerns internally. They escalated their concerns when their initial complaints went unanswered. They attempted over and over again to have serious issues addressed through the proper channels and, in both instances, the whistleblowers were met with a brick wall. That should concern every member of this Assembly because the public interest disclosure process, the formal whistleblowing pathway available to public sector workers, failed them. It failed to respond, it failed to protect and, ultimately, it failed the public interest.

The whistleblower in the CIT matter spoke in their statement about the personal toll that this process has already taken. They said they were devastated to have to make their disclosure public. They felt they no longer had a choice because significant public safety risks continued to go unchecked and, perhaps most damning of all—and members will read this—they said:

This could have been avoided had there been a culture of integrity and probity within senior management, stronger complaints management processes, and ultimately better whistleblowing support and protections here in the ACT.

They nevertheless felt the need to make their disclosure anonymously because they did not have confidence that they would be protected from adverse treatment. A system that forces people to go public because internal accountability mechanisms have broken down is not a system that is functioning as intended. It is certainly not a whistleblowing framework that the ACT can be proud of. A healthy democracy depends on people being willing to speak truth to power, but people will only do that if they know that their government values integrity more than expedience, protectionism or reputation, and if they know that this Assembly is serious about building a public sector culture grounded in accountability and transparency.

This motion is an opportunity for the ACT to reclaim its place as a national leader in democratic integrity, an opportunity to protect workers, to strengthen public trust, and to send a clear message that in this territory those who expose wrongdoing in the public interest will be supported, not silenced; protected, not prosecuted.

I want to thank members who have engaged with me on this motion, including the Chief Minister's office—it has been very constructive—as well as the Leader of the Opposition, Mr Braddock and Ms Carrick. I hope to see this motion supported. Again, when we come to it, I hope to see all members agree to the publication of the documents that have been tabled. I commend my motion to the Assembly.

MR BARR (Kurrajong—Chief Minister, Minister for Economic Development and Minister for Tourism and Trade) (3.23): Speaking firstly to the motion itself, I thank Mr Emerson for bringing it forward, and acknowledge that there has been some productive discussion between his office and mine in relation to the wording of the motion, and the actions that it seeks. I think there is a point of consensus around some of the fundamental principles contained within both the motion and the direction in which the government is moving in this regard.

There is agreement around confidence being built through strong institutions, openness and a willingness to continue to improve policy and legal frameworks, that transparency is central to good governance, and that it does give visibility over decisions, clarity around use of public resources, and confidence in institutions. There is, as Mr Emerson indicated, a strong foundation in this work in the territory. But transparency is not a fixed achievement; it is something that must continue to evolve, alongside community expectations and best practice. That is why there is considerable work underway to strengthen frameworks regarding access to information, open data and proactive disclosure, ensuring information is not just available, but meaningful and acceptable.

Across the ACT public service, there is an expectation of high standards of ethical conduct. These are supported by a range of independent oversight, audit processes and ongoing reform. At the centre of any accountability system is the ability for people to speak up, and to do so safely and with confidence. Whistleblowers, whether they are public officials or members of the community, play a critical role here. They help to identify wrongdoing, seek to improve systems and strengthen public confidence.

The ACT has long been recognised as an early leader in public interest disclosure, but as with any mature system, the task is ongoing, and the focus must be on continuous improvement, and ensuring that the framework keeps pace with evolving expectations and with developments in other jurisdictions.

The ACT system provides a range of important protections. It provides clear pathways, and it supports independent oversight and fair processes. If a public servant or, in some cases, a member of the public becomes aware of wrongdoing, they can make a disclosure. That may relate to corruption, misuse of public resources, serious misconduct, or risks to public safety.

Disclosures can be made to the ACT Integrity Commission or, where appropriate, through a designated officer within a directorate. There are established pathways available. Each year, some disclosures are received and assessed. In 2021-22, for example, there were 11 disclosures, and two met the threshold. In 2022-23, there were six, four of which met the threshold. In 2023-24, there were nine, with one meeting the threshold. In 2024-25, there were 12, with four assessed as public interest disclosures under the act.

Not every concern that is raised will meet the technical definition under the legislation, but every disclosure is taken seriously and is carefully considered. Where the threshold is met, matters are investigated either by the commission or referred to the appropriate agency, often with oversight from the commission. The process is designed to be fair, thorough and independent. Protections for those who speak up are, of course, a central feature of the system. A person's identity is kept confidential wherever possible. Legal

protections apply, and there are safeguards against reprisals or victimisation.

Alongside legal protections, there is practical support, and the commission provides guidance throughout the process. There is a broader witness assistance framework, and this includes the Witness Wellbeing Policy 2025 and the establishment of a dedicated witness wellbeing liaison officer.

For ACT public service employees, support also includes access to counselling and mental health services. Through Converge International, employees and their families can access the Employee Assistance Program and Critical Incident Support services. The Before Blue program provides early intervention mental health coaching. We provide all these services because we recognise that coming forward can be difficult. Support needs to be accessible and responsive to individual circumstances.

The government continues to review and strengthen the public interest disclosure framework. As Mr Emerson mentioned in his remarks, a key part of this work has been the commissioning of the independent Govey review. This was comprehensive and inclusive. It drew on input from across the integrity system and the broader community.

Since tabling a response in June 2024, the government has progressed reforms in a staged and considered way. This Assembly has dealt with multiple pieces of legislation implementing elements of the Govey review. Work on remaining recommendations, including those related to the Public Interest Disclosure Act, continues, and it is a priority during this term of the Assembly.

Last year's budget funded a legislative reform and integrity policy unit within the Chief Minister's directorate. This work is already contributing to foundational reforms, including recent amendments to the Integrity Commission Act. The government continues to support the commission's broader work program, including its inquiry into lobbying and influence. We recognise that there is increasing reform activity in other jurisdictions, and we will continue to learn from those developments.

As part of ensuring that the ACT framework remains effective and fit for purpose, there are always opportunities to improve, and we welcome the opportunity to consider how best to support ACT public servants.

The government supports the importance of a number of factors: firstly, clear guidance; and, secondly, education for staff on whistleblowing pathways, because awareness and accessibility matter. We will continue targeted initiatives to improve the understanding and promotion of reporting pathways.

The proposal for a dedicated support function, including pilot programs, in Mr Emerson's motion, is noted. These reforms, of course, would require careful design, proper consultation and would have a resourcing implication. In the first instance this would, of course, require a budget business case and consideration of this through a future budget process. In doing this work, the government will consult with stakeholders, including the Human Rights Law Centre and the New South Wales Ombudsman, to better understand existing models, to identify gaps and to assess where enhanced support may be most effective. This will include engagement with people with lived experience. We will continue to report on reform progress over the coming

months, as this work advances. The motion from Mr Emerson has a report back date later this year.

The government recognises the role of whistleblowers in maintaining integrity, transparency and accountability, and we acknowledge that those who speak up do so in the public interest. We will be supporting this motion, the policy intent and the work that it entails.

In the time I have left to me, in responding to the question of the publication of the tabled documents, I think it is important that legal advice is sought on the implications for the actual public interest disclosures that have been made. I do not have in front of me, nor would, I think, people expect me to have, the details of the investigations undertaken. They are, understandably, undertaken at arm's length from me.

It would have been helpful if Mr Emerson had indicated that he was intending to undertake this course of action prior to doing so with anyone in this place, so that we could have perhaps been able to facilitate the outcome that he is seeking. In doing so unannounced and without any sense of the implications of these statements becoming public, for the matters that are referred to here, I do not know whether this will fundamentally undermine these public interest disclosures. I do not think anyone else in this place does at this point, because we are not privy to the investigations that have been announced and are underway.

I realise and recognise that it is an important role for members in this place to raise issues of this kind, but I think the worst possible outcome would be if publishing this, putting it out in the public arena, undermines the very work that is being undertaken by the integrity agencies. That would be a very disappointing outcome. I certainly do not want to be party to that by just waving it through without thinking about it and getting some advice.

They do not need to be published this afternoon, and it might be wise for the Assembly to get some considered advice on the implications under the relevant laws about authorising the publication of these documents. I do not know; I am not a lawyer, and I do not profess to have the answer to the question. I do not know, and I certainly do not appreciate being put on the spot, having regard to what occurred half an hour ago.

I have received some advice from Mr Emerson's office that he could not tell my office or give any advance notice. I do not know why. I do not know whether this is the best practice that this Assembly needs to be endorsing. I am not saying that these documents cannot ever be published. I do not have a view on that. What I do have a view on is that I do not want this to legally undermine the investigations and the work of the relevant integrity agencies on these specific matters. I think the Assembly would be wise to make a considered decision here, not one on the run, with no notice.

MR PARTON (Brindabella—Leader of the Opposition) (3.35): I am just going to start with the area that Mr Barr was speaking on, and that is in regard to the publication of material that has now been circulated by Mr Emerson. It has been a very difficult situation to deal with on the fly. I believe that we are forming a similar position to that of the Chief Minister, and that is, without a deeper understanding of the legal implications and other implications that would arise from the publication, instantly, of

these documents, the Canberra Liberals are not in a position—if and when that is moved later in the day, later in this debate—to support it. Indeed, I think we would be of a mind to suspend or at least adjourn debate on that specific matter, potentially, until tomorrow morning, but certainly, I cannot see that we can make a decision on that today.

I think we all appreciate the intent of what is going on here, and I think by and large it is a good and it is a noble intent, but I am of the view that sometimes causing the biggest splash when you enter the water does not necessarily always deliver the best outcomes for all those involved.

Moving on to comments on the motion itself regarding whistleblower protections, I thank Mr Emerson for bringing this matter to the Assembly. Whistleblowers of course play a vital role in our democracy and long may they do so. They shine a light where things go wrong. They hold public institutions to account. My party has been in opposition for a long time. We obviously have a much smaller machine than government, and often there is some interesting information—not necessarily on this PID whistleblower level, but we are by and large extremely supportive of the vibe of this motion, because we think that whistleblowers potentially give Canberrans confidence that public money and public power are being used properly. Without people willing to speak up, misconduct can fester behind closed doors. None of us in this place want to see that.

The motion is right to note that the ACT was an early mover, and our Public Interest Disclosure Act 1994 made us one of the first jurisdictions globally to introduce dedicated protections, and that was a significant step. Other jurisdictions have been active. We have seen the federal government consult on amendments to strengthen the commonwealth scheme, including a proposed whistleblower ombudsman. New South Wales embedded a support function within its ombudsman, piloting legal and wellbeing referrals, and Queensland has looked at legal support funding.

The issues are complex: getting the balance right between encouraging disclosures, protecting individuals and ensuring fair process for all parties takes time; it takes careful drafting. The Canberra Liberals are broadly in support, and I do not know that I have really got to say more about it. Thank you, Mr Emerson, and thank you, members.

MR BRADDOCK (Yerrabi) (3.39): I will confine my comments to just the heart of Mr Emerson's motion at the moment. At the moment, we do not have the substantive debate on the suspension of standing orders, so I will defer my comments on that until I get a chance—if we do—to talk about that.

Firstly, I would like to say that we support Mr Emerson's motion. At its heart his motion speaks to something fundamental: the community's expectation that the government operates with transparency, accountability and integrity. These are not abstract ideals; they are pillars of a functioning democracy.

And yet across Australia, we are seeing whistleblowers—people who act in the public interest—being prosecuted and dismissed for truth-telling. The persecution of whistleblowers cuts directly against the principles we claim to uphold. Without a shared commitment to the truth, even where it is contested, uncomfortable or inconvenient,

democratic institutions simply cannot function as they should. Whistleblowers play a vital role in maintaining integrity and accountability. They shine a light where others would prefer darkness and expose wrongdoing where systems have failed. Too often they do this at great personal cost.

Here in the ACT, we are fortunate to have reasonably strong integrity frameworks, including a robust Integrity Commission, but we cannot be complacent. The broader legislative architecture that supports whistleblowers, particularly the Public Interest Disclosure framework, is not working as effectively as it should.

The ACT government undertook a review of the Public Interest Disclosure Act in 2023 and subsequently, in June 2024, committed to providing a more substantive and considered response to that review. The government stipulated that this work would be progressed in the Eleventh Assembly. To date, that response has not been delivered. Now that we are a year and a half into this term, the government should have something more substantive to show for it. We therefore encourage the government to bring forward its response and to ensure that any reforms meaningfully strengthen whistleblower protections.

In relation to line item (3)(b), which proposes embedding a whistleblower support function within a public sector body, we are supportive of the intent of this call. It is important, however, that careful consideration is given to where this function is best situated. In our view, the Integrity Commission should remain focused on investigating the most serious corrupt conduct. The Office of the Public Sector Standards Commissioner may be seen as too closely connected to the government of the day to provide the necessary independence required. The Human Rights Commission may present a more suitable option, and we are open to this being explored further.

There may also be merit in considering the Ombudsman's role and how we could leverage a federal move in this space with the passage of the legislation which will see the Commonwealth Ombudsman—who also happens to be the ACT Ombudsman—fulfilling a similar function for the federal level. Ultimately, we recognise that the design of such a function requires thoughtful development, and we look forward to the government's response on this matter.

The Greens have consistently advocated for practical measures to support whistleblowers, improve transparency and restore public trust in our institutions, because the reality is this: whistleblowers continue to pay an unfair price for exposing unethical and at times, unlawful conduct. If we are serious about integrity, we must ensure that truth is not punished but protected. We support the intent of this motion and look forward to seeing meaningful action that gives effect to it.

MS CARRICK (Murrumbidgee) (3.42): I thank Mr Emerson for bringing forward this very important motion. Whistleblowers play an important role in transparency, accountability and good public administration. If people see serious wrongdoing, they should be able to raise concerns safely and clearly without fear of being isolated or punished. Whistleblowers are often treated as the problem, when in many cases they are the early warning system.

A healthy public sector should not rely on people being unusually brave, unusually

persistent or willing to risk their career before serious issues come to light. That is why support matters. A legal framework is important, but legislation alone does not create confidence. People need clear guidance, independent support and practical help to understand their options before things escalate.

The New South Wales Ombudsman's whistleblower support model is a useful example. It provides confidential and impartial support, helps people understand their options and can refer people to legal or wellbeing support. That matters because we cannot assume internal workplace processes will always be enough, especially where the concern relates to a person's own workplace. The value of that model is that it gives people a place to go early, not after the damage has already been done. It is important that we push for transparency, accountability and practical reforms that make government work better.

The ACT reviewed its Public Interest Disclosure Act in 2023. The government has had time to consider the recommendations. It is reasonable for this Assembly to ask for a clear update, a timeline and options for implementation. This motion asks the government to do the work it has already committed to and to come back with options, costs and timelines. A practical accountability measure like this does not need to be delayed.

I support this motion because it is constructive. It asks the government to come back with practical options, costs and timelines. If we want a public sector that learns from problems, we need a culture where people can speak up safely. That is a reasonable request, and I am pleased to support this motion.

MR EMERSON (Kurrajong) (3.45), in reply: I do want to thank members for their contributions. I can understand the frustration at not having been given a heads-up. My priority through this process is protecting the people who have come forward to me and entrusted me with the issues that they have sought to raise through this Assembly, and that remains my priority.

Members will deliberate on the publication of the documents that I have tabled: the two public interest disclosures and accompanying statements. The CIT whistleblower public interest disclosure I mentioned is from 9 January 2026 addressed to margot.mcneill@cit.edu.au. I will allow members to read through the contents, but it begins with:

Dear Margot, I am writing to formally raise serious safety, compliance and governance concerns within the EVCOE program. These matters have already been raised within the EV team and with WHS, however, the activities continue. I am escalating directly to you because I currently do not have confidence in the internal reporting pathways, as these issues have already been raised higher with no action. I also want to avoid taking these concerns to the Integrity Commission directly, as it will damage CIT's reputation further. I wish to remain anonymous, although I do have evidence if required. My aim is to ensure you are aware of the risk, and I trust you will take appropriate action regarding the concerns below.

Thereafter follows a page and a half or so disclosing those concerns.

This whistleblower, as I have mentioned, also provided a statement justifying the

hopefully impending publication of this public interest disclosure, in which the whistleblower said:

This statement outlines the steps I have taken to raise serious safety, fraud and maladministration concerns within CIT that affect staff, students and the broader ACT and New South Wales community. The fact this statement has to be anonymous demonstrates the need for stronger whistleblower protections and stronger internal reporting mechanisms within the public sector.

The concerns relate to dangerous electric vehicle EV training practices, fraudulent procurement, maladministration of public funds, governance failures, and noncompliance with workplace safety and training obligations. These activities pose significant safety risks to CIT staff, students and the Australian public, yet they continue to occur despite multiple reports and escalations through the reporting avenues available to me.

Concerns regarding unsafe EV training practices within the Electric Vehicle TAFE Centre of Excellence were raised internally in 2025. They were initially ignored and disregarded. They were then escalated later in 2025. Despite that escalation, the unsafe activities continued. I am not aware of any effective investigation, enforcement action or direction to cease the activities.

After observing the conduct was continuing, I sent a formal public interest disclosure to CIT's Disclosure Officer and CEO in January 2026. The disclosure outlined concerns relating to the use of external hire vehicles for electric vehicle training without disclosure to hire companies; the use of ACT government fleet vehicles, personal and family vehicles for training activities; electric vehicle training occurring in locations after work health and safety raised concerns about them being unsuitable; procurement and probity concerns; concerns regarding training courses potentially being delivered without proper approval processes.

I hold serious concerns about the safety of the public and CIT staff and students. I am particularly concerned that electric vehicles have been worked on by unqualified students and are being unknowingly hired and driven by members of the public. I made the disclosure anonymously because I did not have confidence that a staff member raising these concerns would be protected from adverse treatment. There is an endemic culture within CIT of silence, of turning a blind eye to poor or unsafe practices and of disdain towards those who raise concerns or question practices.

Staff have been instructed not to openly discuss these work health and safety breaches. Many executives believe and act as though they are accountable to nobody, and I believe CIT will continue to have problems until this is systematically addressed. My intention, as outlined in the PID at that stage, was to ensure the matters were addressed internally and appropriately, without causing further reputational damage to CIT. However, after making the disclosure, many of the activities continued.

To my knowledge, the matter was not referred to the Integrity Commission. I did not receive any indication that the disclosure had been formally recognised as a PID, and the conduct I had reported on did not cease. This gave me the impression that either no proper investigation had occurred, or that the concerns were not treated with the seriousness required given the potential serious safety, legal and governance implications.

Additional concerning activities of the same nature continued over the following months. By April 2026, I no longer believed that the standard internal reporting mechanisms were effective, nor did the concerns receive the appropriate investigation or required action. After repeated attempts to raise the issues internally with no apparent resolution, I approached MLA Thomas Emerson as a last resort. I attempted to follow the appropriate internal pathways first, including raising concerns through my direct reporting channels, then through internal oversight areas and then through a formal PID process directly to senior leadership. I escalated externally to an MLA only after those mechanisms appeared to fail due to long-term broader systemic and governance issues.

The whistleblowing framework that is meant to support a culture of integrity, probity and safety in the public sector has clearly failed, and that is why stronger whistleblower protections are necessary. I am not the only person within the public sector who feels they are unable to speak up or report serious wrongdoing. In my experience, many staff believe disclosures will not be acted upon, and unsafe or unlawful conduct will continue. Senior management are able to ignore or suppress concerns without accountability due to ineffective governance structures, and anonymity and protection from reprisal cannot be guaranteed.

This matter also demonstrates broader systemic governance issues. Anonymous internal reporting mechanisms are clearly ineffective if disclosures can be received by senior leadership without meaningful and swift investigation, without appropriate escalation and without visible action to address ongoing risks. Where safety concerns and allegations of fraud or maladministration can continue after multiple internal reports, confidence in CIT's internal integrity processes is eroded.

I am providing this statement because public sector staff should be able to raise serious concerns safely, confidentially and with confidence that appropriate action will follow. I am very concerned that the safety implications of the concerns I have raised were not treated with the urgency and seriousness they demand and that this has put members of the public and CIT staff and students at risk. I am also concerned that the conduct of executives is ultimately destroying the credibility of CIT as a nation-leading Vocational Education Institute.

I deeply value the work that CIT does, and the quality education it can and should be delivering to our community. I am devastated that I have had to take this approach but ultimately felt I no longer had a choice. This could have been avoided had there been a culture of integrity and probity within senior management, stronger complaints management processes and, ultimately, better whistleblowing support and protections here in the ACT.

In closing, I thank members for their contribution and consideration of publishing public interest disclosures, the other accompanying statement and also this one. I also want to thank nation-leading whistleblower law authority Kieran Pender, from the Human Rights Law Centre, for providing his expert input to help shape this motion for assisting in the work of parliamentarians in supporting whistleblowers to come forward and speak out and for his broader advocacy and direct efforts both to increase and enliven legal protections for people exposing wrongdoing in our country. I would also encourage members to have a look at the Human Rights Law Centre's pre-budget submission, which is directly relevant to this motion.

In the 2024 *Boyle v DPP (Cth)* decision, the South Australian Court of Appeal adopted a narrow interpretation of whistleblower protections, resulting in the prosecution of Richard Boyle after he exposed unethical debt recovery practices within the ATO. That case sent a chilling message to whistleblowers across Australia that even when you act in the public interest, even when you are not the taxpayer-funded official who has committed the wrongdoing, the system may not protect you.

That is why it is so important for the ACT to act on whistleblower protections—to respect also the wishes of the whistleblowers who provided these documents today. We should not wait for a whistleblower here in Canberra to suffer retaliation before we rush to strengthen the law, and we should not settle for merely catching up to other jurisdictions. The ACT should once again set the national benchmark for integrity and accountability. We have the largest rate of public sector employment in the country.

We are also home to Australia’s longest-serving government. Of course longevity in government might not be an inherently bad thing, but every long-serving government must actively guard against complacency, against insularity, against the proclivity for protectionism—the proclivity to go along to get along, which is even more likely to emerge in a small jurisdiction, where everyone knows everyone and word gets around quickly when someone is rocking the boat.

We must guard against a “yes, minister” culture becoming embedded within institutions that are supposed to protect the public interest, not protect power. Strong whistleblower protections are not a threat to good government; they are essential to good government, because accountability does not weaken our public institutions—it strengthens them. Transparency does not undermine trust: secrecy does. And when our public sector workforce does not feel empowered to speak up, wrongdoing can persist and come to permeate our institutions.

I do want to thank members for supporting the passage of this motion. I understand it has unfolded in a different way than members anticipated, and I do understand the frustration. With that, I am very pleased, though, to see this motion passed. The clauses it contains are critical, and I am really happy that members across the Assembly see that, appreciate that, agree with that and are happy to support the establishment, especially, of the whistleblower support function that this Assembly has agreed to get behind today.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Standing orders—suspension

MR EMERSON (Kurrajong) (3.54): I move:

That so much of the standing orders be suspended as would prevent the public interest disclosure documents tabled by Mr Emerson today from being authorised for publication.

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

Canberra Health Services—occupational violence

MR PARTON (Brindabella—Leader of the Opposition) (3.55): I move:

That this Assembly:

(1) notes:

- (a) repeated and escalating incidents of occupational violence across the ACT public health system, including physical assaults, strangulation and staff trapped in unsafe clinical areas;
- (b) the failure of this Government to publicly report incidents of occupational violence;
- (c) ongoing concerns raised repeatedly by frontline health workers and unions about staff safety risks that have not been acted upon by this Government;
- (d) more than 100 incidents of physical harm to staff have been reported within the Critical Services Building since opening; and
- (e) that no healthcare worker should be expected to accept violence as “part of the job”;

(2) further notes that:

- (a) public health staff have repeatedly raised concerns about inadequate security arrangements, unsafe designs and insufficient staffing levels;
- (b) this Government’s lack of transparency regarding violent incidents in ACT public hospitals remains inadequate and intentionally prevents public accountability;
- (c) it condemns and rejects any suggestion that violence against healthcare workers is unavoidable or inevitable;
- (d) the NSW Government has passed legislative reforms creating specific offences and increased penalties for assaults against frontline emergency and health workers; and
- (e) the current legal framework within the ACT may not provide sufficient deterrent against violence directed towards healthcare workers; and

(3) calls on the Government to:

- (a) publicly acknowledge that the current level of occupational violence in the ACT public health system represents a systemic workplace safety failure;
- (b) release de-identified quarterly data on occupational violence incidents across the public health system;
- (c) review if existing laws provide adequate protections and penalties for assaults against frontline health workers, including comparisons of protections in the Crimes Legislation Amendment (Assaults on Frontline Emergency and Health Workers) Bill 2022 (NSW);
- (d) finalise enterprise bargaining agreement negotiations and consider including and extending occupational violence leave for critical incidents and trauma pertaining to frontline workers; and
- (e) report back to the Assembly within three months on actions taken to improve occupational safety with the public health system.

Every employer and every workplace has the responsibility to keep their staff safe. That responsibility does not disappear simply because the work is difficult, because it is emotionally demanding or because it is carried out in moments of crisis. And nowhere should that obligation matter more than in our public health system. The nurses, doctors, allied health professionals, security staff and support workers who care for our community deserve to go to work knowing that their safety matters too. Occupational violence is a serious workplace safety issue, and I am pretty sure we all agree—I think we are all on the same page here—that it demands serious attention, serious prevention and serious accountability.

In recent weeks the public has become increasingly aware of deeply concerning incidents occurring within our health system. On 22 April, eight Canberra Health Services staff were trapped in a confined clinical space during an incident involving a patient armed with a knife. Staff were reportedly unable to exit and they were left exposed to significant risk. Certainly that was their belief. We have since learnt of another case in which a healthcare worker was allegedly strangled while at work.

These are deeply distressing incidents. But what is equally concerning is the suggestion that violence of this nature is somehow inevitable, that it is just simply part of the job—and I reject that proposition entirely. I am not suggesting that anyone in this chamber is specifically making that statement, but there are those who just believe that it is a part of the role. No nurse should accept violence as a part of their employment. No doctor should accept violence as an unavoidable condition of care. No healthcare worker, regardless of their role, should be expected to tolerate assault, intimidation, strangulation or fear as the price of just showing up to work.

This motion is not about isolated incidents; it is about a pattern. It is about a workplace culture and system that frontline staff and their unions have repeatedly warned are unsafe. We now know that more than 100 incidents of physical harm to staff have reportedly occurred within the Critical Services Building since opening, including 76 reports within the behavioural assessment unit alone. I think that should concern every member of this place, because behind every statistic is a worker, someone who went to work to care for others and instead experienced violence themselves. Quite a number of those workers have reached out to me and to my office, and they talk about going through the RiskMan process but they also talk about some outcomes that are suboptimal.

I also acknowledge the concerns raised publicly this week by the Australian Federal Police Association, which has warned that escalating violence within public health facilities is increasingly becoming a policing issue as well as a workplace safety issue. When violence escalates in hospitals, police are often called as the last line of defence, entering volatile environments, often with incomplete information and after the risk has already escalated. That should be a concern to all of us. This is not simply about the safety of healthcare workers; it is also about public safety and police safety, and it is about whether government systems are working together to prevent foreseeable harm before crisis intervention becomes necessary. The AFPA rightly points out that police should not become the default response to preventable failures in workplace safety, security arrangements or risk management. We know that our frontline police officers will always respond where needed, but government also has a responsibility to ensure that risks are reduced earlier, environments are safer and violence is better prevented.

The government cannot continue to respond to these incidents with silence, with excuses or with suggestions that violence is inevitable. This motion is not simply about identifying a problem; it is about requiring action. We are calling on the government to publicly acknowledge that the current level of occupational violence within our public health system represents a serious and systemic workplace safety failure and that it requires urgent attention. We are calling for greater transparency through de-identified quarterly reporting of occupational violence incidents so that healthcare workers, the community and this Assembly can properly understand the scale and the nature of the issue, rather than relying on media reporting to uncover incidents after the fact. We are calling on the government to properly support affected workers through enterprise bargaining negotiations, including consideration of occupational violence and trauma leave for frontline workers exposed to serious incidents. I understand that the minister and the union have a differing position on exactly where we are at today. We are calling for the government to report back to the Assembly on the concrete actions it has taken to improve workplace safety across the health system.

This motion also calls on the government to review whether the ACT's legal framework provides adequate protections and deterrence for assaults against frontline health workers, including examination of reforms adopted in New South Wales in 2022. New South Wales strengthened protections through legislative reforms that created specific offences and increased penalties for assaults against frontline emergency health workers following growing concerns about violence directed at those who care for our communities. We should not dismiss those reforms, nor should we blindly replicate them. I pre-emptively note some amendments coming from Ms Clay that also extend that examination of other jurisdictions to places outside of New South Wales, and I will certainly support those.

We should seriously ask whether the ACT framework is keeping pace with the realities faced by frontline healthcare and emergency workers and whether stronger protections are warranted here. When it comes to those protections, I know there is a framework which ultimately will have some impact on the way that policing deals and potentially the justice system as well. We are not talking about punishment for punishment sake; it is about sending a clear signal that violence against healthcare workers is unacceptable, that assaults on frontline staff carry serious consequences, and that government has an obligation to ensure that workers are properly protected in environments where risks are known and foreseeable.

But I think I really should make something clear here. Recognising that occupational violence does not detract from the work that we must continue to do in supporting people experiencing mental illness, addiction, trauma or behavioural distress. In fact, the opposite is true. The reality is that we can hold two truths at once—that people experiencing acute mental illness, substance dependence, psychological distress or crisis deserve compassionate, evidence-based care, but that healthcare workers deserve to be safe while providing it. That is the long and short of it. Supporting vulnerable patients and protecting frontline workers are not competing priorities; they are complementary responsibilities. I think we should reject any false choice that says, “You have to choose one or the other”—that you have to choose between compassion and safety. The answer is better system design, better staffing, safer clinical environments, stronger workplace protections, clearer escalation pathways and

appropriate security measures—not blame, stigma or neglect.

This motion does not seek to vilify patients; it seeks to acknowledge reality. Many incidents of occupational violence occur in highly complex circumstances involving people in crisis, intoxication, acute psychiatric distress or severe behavioural dysregulation. That complexity is precisely why the government has an even greater obligation to ensure that workers are properly protected and supported. Compassion for patients cannot mean complacency about violence. Transparency matters, accountability matters and the safety of healthcare workers absolutely matters. Violence against healthcare workers should never be normalised, it should never be minimised and it should never be accepted simply as part of the job. I commend this motion to the Assembly.

MS STEPHEN-SMITH (Kurrajong—Minister for Health, Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Finance and Minister for the Public Service) (4.05): I thank Mr Parton for bringing this motion to the Assembly and drawing our attention again to the very important issue of occupational violence in our health system.

Mr Parton’s rhetoric would have you think that the risk of occupational violence is something the government has been unaware of. He has floated a lot of balloons of, “Minister, is this true?” as if something is true that is not and has set a lot of hares running. So I want to start by reiterating that occupational violence is not acceptable. It is not acceptable in any workplace. It is certainly not acceptable in our health services. That is why for many years our leadership teams and our management teams have had a focus on addressing occupational violence. It is why it has been an absolute focus of our work with industrial representatives, including the Australian Nursing and Midwifery Federation—but not only them.

Occupational violence, both physical and psychological, including verbal aggression, is foreseeable and it continues to occur across our health services. That challenge is not unique to the ACT. It is widely reported in academic literature that healthcare professionals globally are facing increasing various forms of occupational violence. Addressing occupational violence requires action on many fronts, and the ACT government will continue to work hard and address this for our staff.

I would note that Mr Parton has indicated an understanding around the distress that some patients experience and has again sought to suggest that the government has suggested that there is a choice between caring for patients in distress and safety for our staff. I absolutely reject that characterisation. No-one here would suggest that it is one or the other. We have been very clear, WorkSafe has been clear and our unions have been clear that staff safety is the priority. Staff safety is the priority, but our staff also recognise that they have patients to care for and families to care for who may be in distress and who may not be in control of their own actions at all times.

Addressing occupational violence requires action on many fronts, as I said, but I completely reject the premise that there is a lack of transparency regarding occupational violence in ACT public hospitals. As Mr Parton has now recognised, occasions of staff absence caused by occupational violence are publicly reported in the Canberra Health Services annual report. In addition, this is an ongoing topic of conversation with unions and is part of a dashboard which I have asked Canberra Health Services to look at what

of that we can release and how regularly—and we are very happy to increase transparency around that, as I always am.

WorkSafe, as the independent workplace safety regulator, adopts a thorough approach to reviewing and investigating incidents that supports accountability and transparency. Occupational violence forms and reporting are generally considered standing agenda items across the various workplace consultative committees with relevant industrial partners. Data on the number of incidents is often presented at these meetings, and industrial partners have the opportunity to consider this data. So, while the ACT government may not currently publicly report the number of occupational violence incidents, it is not due to a lack of transparency or accountability—and I will be moving some amendments in relation to this matter.

As I outlined in my ministerial statement on the incident in the behavioural assessment unit, Canberra Health Services continues to manage high volumes of occupational violence, with 2025-26 year-to-date data showing approximately 1,550 verbal incidents and around 1,000 physical incidents across all locations. Verbal aggression has increased slightly compared to 2024-25, while physical incidents have stabilised at a high but comparable level—again, I reiterate: a level that is not acceptable, but goes against the rhetoric of a rapid escalation.

I would like to remind members of the Assembly that CHS staff care for people with complex care needs who are often distressed. In many cases, staff are often interacting with people who are experiencing one of the worst days of their lives. I am talking about people and their loved ones who may have received life-altering news, people who may be feeling incredibly anxious or overwhelmed and people with significant vulnerabilities that may impact their ability to regulate their emotions. As someone texted into radio this morning, this is not just about people in psychiatric distress experiencing psychosis or mental health challenges or even alcohol and other drug challenges. In many instances, people may be experiencing the impact of dementia or delirium which results in them behaving violently towards health staff. Again, the capacity to deescalate those situations and the capacity to respond to those situations in a way that keeps staff safe is vitally important. But there is no point in demonising the individuals who are experiencing dementia, delirium or psychosis. That is not helping anybody.

It is understandable why some people act out in a moment of stress or heightened emotion because of their own health circumstances. But, again, it does not mean we accept it. We certainly do not expect our healthcare workers or any other worker, for that matter, to accept that occupational violence is “part of the job”. We know that occupational violence has a significant impact on the physical and psychological wellbeing of our staff, and we will keep strengthening the prevention activities and responses to occupational violence.

I will note that I mentioned earlier that Canberra Health Services had undertaken a forum with staff on occupational violence on 6 May following the most recent incident. I will quote from an email or a message that went around to staff from the Chief Operating Officer following that forum, providing an update on a newly established Canberra Health Services OV committee:

The committee has been established to strengthen how we prevent, respond and learn from OV across our network. Our focus includes progressing the OV prevention action plan, improving how we monitor and manage high-risk incidents, strengthening reporting and staff support processes, building capability through training and tracking progress to ensure continuous improvement.

The committee meets monthly and reports to the network executive ensuring OV remains a clear organisational priority. The membership of this committee brings together a broad cross-section of expertise from across Canberra Health Services, including leaders from our hospitals and community services, as well as security, work health and safety, people and culture and a consumer representative. This multidisciplinary approach is critical to ensuring our actions are practical, coordinated and effective across all care settings.

In addition to the committee's work, each general manager is progressing local initiatives to address OV risks that are specific to their site and services. This ensures that solutions are tailored, relevant and meaningful at the local level, supporting safer environments for staff, patients and visitors.

The Chief Operating Officer went on to say that one of the strongest themes she heard at the OV forum was “the need to better communicate what we are doing” and that in response, she—the Chief Operating Officer—would:

... continue to provide regular updates following each committee meeting so you can see what is changing, where progress is being made, and what actions are underway. Your input remains essential to this work, so please continue to raise risks, share ideas, and use existing reporting and feedback channels.

I would reiterate that message from the Chief Operating Officer: we do want to hear from staff. Their experiences and their views are vitally important if we are going to address this complex challenge. The Chief Operating Officer concluded by saying that that week she attended the first executive round table on occupational violence with representatives from across ACT government, saying:

This highlights that occupational violence is recognised as an important issue for frontline workers across the ACT public service and reinforces that our efforts, CHS's efforts, are part of a broader service-wide commitment to improving safety.

I am very pleased that CHS is taking these additional actions, but I would note that these are on top of an Occupational Violence Action Plan from 2024 to 2028, which already provides a structured roadmap for reducing incidents, improving preventive controls and strengthening organisational responses over the medium term. That plan is supported by updated procedures that clarify roles, responsibilities and escalation pathways, ensuring staff have the tools to prevent, report and respond to occupational violence consistently across services. Again, I emphasise that staff responded to the incident in the BAU exactly as they were trained and expected to do.

In addition, dedicated occupational violence leave pathways are already in place, demonstrating a commitment to staff wellbeing by ensuring employees affected by occupational violence can access appropriate leave and support without ambiguity or delay. We are in ongoing conversations with the union about whether or not to formalise that in the enterprise agreement, recognising that a level of formality sometimes leaves

managers feeling restricted in their ability to be flexible in response to occupational violence experiences, which is exactly what staff have said they need—a level of flexibility and a response that is appropriate in their individual circumstances.

Risk identification and prevention are addressed through strength and safety management plans for behaviours of concern and the introduction of two standardised occupational violence risk assessment tools. The first is the CHS home visit risk assessment tool, which supports staff in identifying and mitigating risks prior to off-site or community-based work. The second is the Occupational Violence ABC tool, which provides a structured framework for assessing, communicating and managing risk. The ABC tool has been fully implemented in both Canberra Hospital and North Canberra Hospital emergency departments, recognising the elevated risk profile in these environments and embedding consistent risk assessment into everyday clinical practice. Workforce-specific safety initiatives, such as the implementation of an isolated worker procedure which is applicable to all staff working alone or remotely, complements the work achieved through the Towards a Safer Culture program. The isolated worker procedure is supported by a dedicated home visit procedure that I have talked about and associated tools, providing clear guidance and practical safeguards for staff undertaking visits in community settings.

Collectively, these actions demonstrate a layered and proactive evidence-based response to occupational violence that integrates policy, culture, risk assessment and staff support. As I have talked about before, these actions also build on the Towards a Safer Culture program, known as TASC, which implemented evidence-based safe wards models, as well as clinical supervision across a range of wards and areas of our hospitals. TASC reinforced shared accountability, respectful behaviours and early intervention, helping to build a safer workplace culture alongside the more formal procedural controls. I have talked about the committee that has recently been newly established and, in addition to that, the work that general managers will do.

I want to reflect on the fact that these recent incidents and the incidents that have been recently talked about have created further distress for staff. I have talked to a couple of emergency department staff who have expressed that the constant relitigating of these issues is causing distress to emergency department staff themselves, particularly when the matters are misrepresented in public. I would add that Mr Parton's commentary in relation to duress alarms has been misleading.

I seek leave to move my amendments together.

Leave granted.

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I move:

1. Omit paragraph (1)(b), substitute:
“(b) occasions of staff absence caused by occupational violence are publicly reported in the Canberra Health Services Annual Report;”.
2. Omit paragraph (2)(b).
3. Omit paragraph (3)(a), substitute:

“(a) publicly acknowledge that the current level of occupational violence in the ACT public health system is not acceptable and that there is an ongoing need to strengthen prevention and responses to occupational violence;”.

MS CLAY (Ginninderra) (4.20): I want to thank Mr Parton for bringing forward this motion, and I want to thank the health minister for engaging and for circulating her amendments. I understand that Mr Parton is happy to accept the amendments moved by the health minister. On that basis, the Greens are happy to support the motion and the amendments. I have also circulated some amendments, and I will circle back to those at the end.

The Greens support this motion addressing occupational violence in our healthcare system. It is not just about workplace safety; it is about our fundamental duty to protect those who dedicate their lives to caring for our community. Occupational violence in health care represents a growing crisis affecting workers across Australia, with healthcare professionals facing rates of violence higher than most other industries. But that does not make it part of the job and it does not mean we should accept it. The psychological and physical impacts extend beyond individual workers to affect patient care, workforce retention and the overall functioning of our health system. Healthcare workers perform such a difficult and essential role that they deserve the utmost respect, safety and dignity.

International evidence consistently shows that proactive systemic approaches are more effective than reactive measures in preventing workplace violence. Transparency is essential for accountability and for meaningful improvement. Without accurate data, we cannot understand the truth, go to the problem, identify emerging patterns or measure the effectiveness of our interventions. Evidence-based policy requires learning from what works elsewhere; so reviewing interventions from other jurisdictions demonstrates our commitment to implementing the most effective measures, not just any measures. We may already be implementing the most effective measures, but the amendments that I have put up are designed to make sure that we stop and think, have a little look at the options that are in other places and make sure that we are using the most effective measures. We also think that we should consider whether we need some more formalised arrangements with the ACT Ambulance Service and with ACT Policing. Exploring those MOUs between emergency services and health services recognises that safety requires coordination across different parts of our response system, and we may be able to make some improvements there.

Making sure any healthcare worker who has experienced a traumatic incident in the course of their work can take leave is clearly something they should be entitled to do, and surely the least we can do. Protecting healthcare workers from violence is not optional; it is our moral and legal obligation. This motion represents an important step to fulfilling that obligation through transparency, evidence-based policy and a commitment to implementing the best possible measures that we can find to create safe working environments for the people who are caring for us.

Ms Stephen-Smith's amendments agreed to.

MS CLAY (Ginninderra) (4.24): I move:

After paragraph (3)(c) insert new paragraphs:

- “(d) review interventions undertaken by other jurisdictions (in Australia and overseas) to reduce occupational violence in healthcare, to ascertain whether the ACT Government has adopted the most effective means for achieving this, or if there are more effective means worth implementing here;
- (e) consider whether a formal MOU to better connect the ACT Ambulance Service (ACTAS) and ACT Policing operations with Health will assist in reducing occupational violence in healthcare;”.

MS STEPHEN-SMITH (Kurrajong—Minister for Health, Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Finance and Minister for the Public Service) (4.24): Very briefly, we are happy to support the amendment circulated by Ms Clay. I think she makes a fair point around reviewing interventions undertaken by other jurisdictions. In fact, that is exactly what Canberra Health Services and the Health and Community Services Directorate have been doing through the Towards a Safer Culture strategy and also with the relatively recent implementation of code grey, which represents a risk that is a step down from a code black.

I had a conversation recently with a staff member who had experienced some significant occupational violence, who reflected that there remains a lack of clarity around the code grey versus code black response, compared to another jurisdiction in which that person had worked where code grey had been in place for a longer period of time. That is another piece of feedback that we will be taking on board and looking at how code grey is used in other jurisdictions and the communication to staff about the difference between code grey and code black and how those responses are intended to occur. So I absolutely accept Ms Clay’s point that looking at evidence in other jurisdictions is really important.

While I am here, I would just provide some information for Mr Parton. He has talked a few times about duress systems. I want to put on the record in relation to the duress system in the Critical Services Building, or building 5, that there are two types of duress systems. There is a fixed duress system called C-Cure. A new instance of C-Cure was implemented and commissioned to support the Critical Services Building at Canberra Hospital. This is a modern enterprise grade physical security system used to manage building access control and for the connection of fixed duress buttons. The fixed duress system is physically connected to the security platform via hardwired inputs. So when a duress button is activated an alarm is generated within the security management system and monitored by security operations, includes location details and is distributed to appropriate personnel by a pager annunciator or alerting systems for the response.

There is also a mobile duress system, called Ascom. A new Ascom mobile duress system, with full redundancy, was implemented and commissioned during the construction of the Critical Services Building for the emergency department in October 2024. This system is widely used across Australian health services, including New South Wales Health and Queensland Health, for mobile duress. The mobile duress system utilises wi-fi signals to triangulate a staff members position in the building where a duress alarm is raised. This location is then sent out as a text message to all

other handsets on the ward. In the case of a code black alarm, it is also sent to pagers.

Mr Parton raised questions around duress system outages for the Canberra Hospital emergency department since the opening of building 5 on 17 August 2024, which is 648 days ago. I am pleased to advise that there have been no unplanned outages of the mobile duress function since 17 August 2024. There has been one planned maintenance outage of the ED mobile duress system during this time. Planned outages are obviously advised in advance and business continuity processes are put in place. For the fixed duress system, there have been six planned maintenance outages, with, again, those business continuity plans and advanced indication. There have been seven unplanned system communication interruptions—for example, where duress calls are taking more than five seconds to be registered, or that is the definition of the interruption. Those interruptions have amounted to a total interruption time of 25 minutes since building 5 was commissioned 648 days ago, with the longest individual interruption being 10 minutes. So, yes, occasionally these things occur. I can advise, from my viewing of code yellow email alerts, that they occur a lot less in building 5 since the new systems were introduced than across some of our other facilities.

MRS MORRIS (Brindabella) (4.29): I thank Mr Parton for moving a very sensible motion today. At the heart of this motion is a very simple principle, and that is that no worker should go to work expecting to be assaulted, threatened, strangled, trapped or placed in fear, and it is not good enough to simply accept this as part of the job. Our nurses, doctors and administrative staff do some of the most important work in our community. They care for people when they are frightened, sick, distressed, intoxicated, in crisis or in pain. We acknowledge that that work will always involve a level of complexity. It will always involve human emotion and fragility. But human complexity is not an excuse for unsafe workplaces. The reports that we are now hearing are deeply concerning: physical assaults, staff trapped in unsafe clinical areas, and more than 100 incidents of physical harm in the Critical Services Building since it opened. These are not isolated grumbles; they point to a system that is not properly protecting the people who hold it together.

This motion is rightly focused on occupational violence in our public health system, but we should be clear that unsafe systems in one part of government places pressure on other frontline services too. The consequences are felt by the ACT Ambulance Service and ACT Policing as well. Paramedics are often the first to enter volatile situations involving mental health crisis, drug and alcohol affected patients or violent behaviour before a person even reaches a hospital. Police are often called when those risks escalate beyond what paramedics, health staff or security can safely manage. The work that our frontline workers do and the risks that they undertake are often intrinsically linked. As the head of the Australian Federal Police Association, Alex Caruana, said today:

... violence in hospitals does not remain confined to the health system.

“When violence escalates in a hospital, police are often the last line of defence. ACT Policing members are called into volatile environments where they may have limited information, limited control over the setting and limited ability to prevent the situation before it reaches a crisis point.

Our frontline workers will always respond when the community needs them. Paramedics will keep showing up. Healthcare workers will keep treating patients.

Police will keep attending dangerous incidents. But the government cannot treat their courage as a substitute for safe workplaces. That is why transparency matters. The public should not have to rely on media reports, union warnings or individual stories to understand the scale of occupational violence in our health system.

Quarterly reporting would give the Assembly, the workforce and the community a clearer picture of what is happening, where it is happening and whether the government's response is actually working. Better information sharing should lead to better outcomes. On that, I note the amendment from Ms Clay to better connect the ACT Ambulance Service and ACT Policing with Health. I think this is a most sensible contribution to this debate. There should be a clear exchange of information between our frontline workers, Canberra Health Services, the ACT Ambulance Service and ACT Policing because their work is so often intrinsically linked.

The hospital incident referred to in Mr Parton's remarks raises questions about how safety-critical and risk information moves between the affected groups. This motion is not about pretending every difficult incident can be eliminated; it is about rejecting the idea that violence is too complex to counter; it is about saying clearly that frontline workers deserve protection, proper reporting, proper laws, proper staffing and proper support after traumatic incidents.

I thank all of our healthcare workers, our paramedics and our police who every day continue to serve our community in some of the most complex and distressing situations. But we owe them more than our praise and thanks; we owe them safe workplaces. I commend this motion to the Assembly.

MS CHEYNE (Ginninderra—Manager of Government Business, Attorney-General, Minister for Human Rights, Minister for City and Government Services and Minister for the Night-Time Economy) (4.34): I am pleased with the furious agreement that I think we are all in with the amendments to the motion. I appreciate Mr Parton bringing it forward today. Minister Stephen-Smith's amendment in particular puts the government's position on the record where it belongs, in that the current level of occupational violence in the ACT public health system is not acceptable. It is not part of the job. It is not the price of working in care. It is not something that nurses, nurse practitioners, midwives, doctors, allied health staff, security, cleaners or wards people should be expected to absorb. It is important that we continue to publicly report, through the annual report, the rate at which it happens and the consequences for staff. Transparency is one of the things that drives change.

Before I continue, I want to acknowledge that this is a motion regarding the frontline workforce in health services, and in no way do I want to diminish this motion by introducing other frontline roles, but, equally, my ministerial role encompasses many staff in frontline roles outside the health services system, and, if they were to hear this speech, I do not want them to think that there is no acknowledgement of what they are exposed to as well. So I briefly want to say that I believe it affects all frontline roles and it is not confined to the ACT. We have seen it really escalate since COVID. There is more occupational violence and it occurs in places that might not immediately spring to mind. It occurs in our service centres and our libraries, and to parking inspectors, our place management crews and mowing teams. Ultimately, there is reduced social trust, and even respect towards frontline roles as a whole. It does not take away the trauma,

by any means, that is occurring in Canberra Health Services or elsewhere in our health system, but I want to acknowledge that this is something that frontline workers across the ACT are experiencing.

In my role as Attorney-General, I will briefly say that the government has a responsibility to ensure that the criminal law remains principled, proportionate and compatible with human rights. Importantly, I want to acknowledge that the law already does respond. If someone assaults a nurse in an ACT emergency department, prosecutors have the full Crimes Act available: common assault, assault occasioning actual bodily harm, grievous bodily harm, and intentionally inflicting grievous bodily harm, and that carries a maximum of 20 years imprisonment. They are not lesser charges; in serious cases, they are more serious than a bespoke frontline worker offence would likely carry.

The 2023 review of the frontline community service provider offences tested whether the provisions were working and found that they were. They were used, tested in court and operating as intended. It considered extending it and did not recommend it, not because health worker safety or any other frontline worker safety does not matter—of course it does—but creating a new offence for every occupational group exposed to violence can appear simple and can appear intuitive, but it creates some difficult definitional issues. It can risk elevating some occupations over others, it can fragment the criminal law and it may create offences that disproportionately impact people who are already over-represented in the justice system and, indeed, the health system. The Human Rights Commission observes that prescribing separate offences and higher penalties for assaults against particular occupations may, in principle, limit the right to equality, particularly where those offences have a greater practical impact on vulnerable groups who are more likely to interact with first responders, our frontline services and our health services. That is the part I encourage members in this chamber to sit with and to sit with quite honestly.

The people who assault health workers in our system are often people who are in acute mental health crisis. People with cognitive impairment may be coming down or off a substance. There are people with acquired brain injuries. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Canberrans are over-represented in those cohorts, not by coincidence but because of the structures that funnel people who are unwell into emergency departments and into the justice system. So creating a new offence that turns on a victim's job title, rather than the seriousness of what was done, may increase the criminal exposure of a group already over-policed and over-incarcerated.

That said, time has of course passed since the review. We know that the operational picture continues to be at least as acute as it was at the time of the previous review, and, indeed, all trends are pointing upwards in terms of increases to occupational violence and the nature of what that occupational violence is. I recognise that the operational picture has shifted enough to warrant revisiting the review's findings. Based on the motion as it will be amended, it gives us an opportunity to look broadly at what we can do. If we will not do it, it gives us the floor to explain why, because ultimately health workers and all frontline workers would be owed that reasoning—not platitudes and not thanks, as Mrs Morris said, but an explanation: why not this; why not now?

I commend all the amendments to the Assembly, and certainly put on the record to all

our frontline workers that we do see you. We are certainly treating this motion with the seriousness that this deserves.

MR PARTON (Brindabella—Leader of the Opposition) (4.42): I am just going to close debate, if I can. I want to thank all those who have participated in this debate. That was a thought-provoking contribution from the Attorney-General and, to some extent, on some unintended consequences. When it comes to detail, we can rely on the Attorney-General to bring detail to the table and I think that, certainly, there were some worthwhile fears raised, or at least concern over the fact that, if we do this, we have got to get it absolutely right. Obviously, we are not reinventing the wheel because other jurisdictions have done it.

I acknowledge that, because of the adversarial nature of our parliamentary system, sometimes there is a little bit of jousting that goes on between minister and shadow. That is just the way it is and, I guess, ultimately, that is built on the premise that I am here suggesting to people that I could do this role better than the minister; and the minister is here to suggest to people that there is no possible way that I could do it better than her. And so it is of no great surprise that we joust on things from time to time.

I would also acknowledge that the minister, as the person who is the Minister for Health here in the ACT, has much greater visibility of many, many things in health than I do—because that is just a fact of life. And so, as a consequence, sometimes I am going to get some information which is not complete, and we will prosecute it in a way that we think will lead to a better outcome—but sometimes it is not absolutely right.

I would like to believe that sometimes we may highlight things that the minister is not aware of, but that is just the way it works. And, while we were debating this motion, Louise has emailed us. That is not her real name because it is also a reality that there are people, a lot of health workers in this town who are worried about possible repercussions if they go on the record.

Louise (not her real name) says:

Dear Mr Parton,

Thank you for the motion you brought forward in support of healthcare workers. As a registered nurse and constituent, I appreciate seeing this issue recognised in the Assembly. I am writing because I believe there is an important opportunity to strengthen the motion—

Little bit too late to get an amendment but:

—by explicitly acknowledging that occupational violence affects far more than hospital-based staff. A significant portion of health care in the ACT happens in community settings, satellite health centres, walk-in clinics, and in people's homes, and these environments often operate without the security infrastructure available in hospitals, leaving staff more exposed and with fewer protections.

Community nurses, allied health staff and other frontline workers regularly experience occupational violence in these settings, yet their risk is rarely visible in public discussion or policy. Extending the language of the motion to include all

healthcare environments would ensure that the workers most vulnerable to occupational violence are not intentionally overlooked.

In part, echoing some of the words from Ms Cheyne, because it is hard to know who to leave in and who to leave out. Louise (not her real name) says:

I am grateful for your advocacy on this issue and hope you will consider broadening the scope so that protections and recognition apply across the entire health system.

Louise, taking that on board, it is a little bit too late for an amendment but, I think, broadly speaking, people are on the same page—same “broad approach,” from my friend and colleague, the Minister for Health. I promise we do not hate each other.

So, I commend all that is before us to the Assembly. Thank you.

Ms Clay’s amendment agreed to.

Original question, as amended, resolved in the affirmative.

Orders of the day—discharge

MR BRADDOCK (Yerrabi) (4.47): Forgive me, I am quoting off the Clerk here; any mistakes are purely mine. I am calling on the order of the day to be dealt with, and then pursuant to Standing Order 152 that the order of the day be discharged.

To explain what I am doing, this is my 213 motion to Mr Pettersson during question time. What happened is he referred to the review in his question about the community languages schools. He did not actually quote from the document, which I thought he had done. He only referred to it, in which case my 213 motion is not applicable in this particular case.

I move:

That, pursuant to standing order 152, order of the day Assembly business, relating to proposed order to table a paper quoted by the Minister for Multicultural Affairs, be discharged from the *Notice Paper*.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Integrity Commission and Statutory Office Holders—Standing Committee Report 7

MR COCKS (Murrumbidgee) (4.48): I present the following report:

Integrity Commission and Statutory Office Holders—Standing Committee—
Reports presented—2026—Report 7—*Inquiry into the effectiveness of
transparency arrangements for Members of the Legislative Assembly – Final
Report*, dated 19 May 2026, including a dissenting report (*Mr Werner-Gibbings*),
together with extract of the relevant minutes of proceedings—

I move:

That the report be noted.

This is the seventh report of the Standing Committee on the Integrity Commission and Statutory Office Holders for the Eleventh Assembly.

The Assembly requested the inquiry in its resolution of 9 April 2025, and the committee adopted an amended terms of reference on 21 May 2025.

The committee received 13 submissions including useful information from parliaments across Australia and New Zealand, and tabled its interim report on 16 September 2025.

This final report makes two recommendations and one finding relating to members' staffing allocations.

There is a dissenting report from Mr Werner-Gibblings.

On behalf of the committee, I would like to again thank everyone who took the time to write submissions, in particular the Clerk of the Assembly and clerks of several Australian and the New Zealand parliaments, and the ACT Remuneration Tribunal, for their significant contribution to this inquiry.

I thank the other members of the committee, Mr Andrew Braddock MLA and Mr Taimus Werner-Gibblings MLA.

I commend the report to the Assembly.

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS (Brindabella) (4.50): I am going to speak briefly to my dissenting report to the committee, but I do echo the words of the chair. I thank my colleagues for the discussions that we have had. This, on parliamentary philosophy, is extremely interesting, and I always feel that I am learning a lot in conversation with both of them. Thank you also to the secretariat.

As the chair has noted, this report makes two recommendations. One, that the ACT Remuneration Tribunal should determine staffing allocations for non-executive members. That is problematic at best. However, it also recommends that the tribunal should determine staffing allocations for ministers. That is wild.

I was—and my colleagues can vouch for this—shocked, stunned and ashen-faced when they agreed on these recommendations. It is difficult to overstate how unusual and extravagant the proposals in this report are—but let me try.

For the benefit of Hansard, Madam Assistant Speaker, I am pulling the figurative pin on the allegorical grenade that this report is lobbing at well-established and universally accepted Australian parliamentary practice. The proposal that the ACT Remuneration Tribunal should take on full responsibility for determining staffing allocations for non-executive members of the Legislative Assembly has no precedent in Australia. That it should take on full responsibility for determining staffing allocations for executive

members of the Assembly has no precedent anywhere.

The lack of precedent is not an oversight on the part of every other Australian parliament, in the first instance—and every global parliament in the second. In the first instance, it reflects considered judgments of Australian parliaments that their current arrangements—which reflect the ACT Legislative Assembly’s—are workable and appropriate: “workable” because staff and resources in every Australian parliament are necessarily determined within the broader framework of executive government budgeting and administrative responsibility; “appropriate” because the executive is accountable for public expenditure. It is, therefore, entirely proper that it retains oversight of staffing allocations that are funded from the public purse.

The report’s finding and recommendations address a problem which it does not persuasively demonstrate exists. There is no substantive evidence in this report suggesting that existing Assembly staffing arrangements are failing, or that members are unable to fill their duties under the current model.

I will briefly summarise the points I have put forward in my dissenting report. The ACT Remuneration Tribunal noted that the Assembly staffing arrangements are consistent with other Australian jurisdictions, including the federal parliament. The qualified exceptions are New South Wales, Queensland and the Northern Territory, where differing non-executive bodies do have partial responsibility for determining members’ staffing for electorate staff. Interestingly, it appears that the responsible bodies in those states are not currently fully exercising their powers. But, far more relevantly for the Assembly, we, its members, do not employ electorate staff and so these examples would be very difficult to apply here.

The ACT Remuneration Tribunal has no institutional expertise in these assessments, nor will it ever be placed to gain it. If staffing decisions are made by the tribunal, who is responsible when those decisions prove inadequate or misalign with operational needs?

Ministerial staffing decisions are fundamentally linked to the operational capacity required to run both the government and each government portfolio. They are decisions shaped by the complexity of a minister’s responsibilities, the size and number of the directorates they oversee, their legislative program, and the demands of cabinet government at any given time.

Responsible government requires that the executive retain meaningful control over its own administrative capacity. Non-executive member staffing needs can also vary widely, based on shadow portfolio responsibilities, whether one is a member of a party, constituency demands, legislative workload and unforeseen events. These factors require responsive, flexible management; qualities that are at odds with the tribunal’s periodic and deliberative processes.

The tribunal may not, or may not be able to, recognise the difference in non-executive MLA responsibilities, for instance whether they are Leader of the Opposition or an independent without party support. Nor might it be able to flexibly change its determinations, once made, to reallocate staffing as and when party leaders or party affiliations change within an Assembly term. Furthermore, staffing would have to be

no longer allocated per party, as it is now. The tribunal would have to allocate staff and funding per MLA office, which would prevent parties pulling staff between offices.

Mr Speaker, in my dissenting report I metaphorically took my hat off to my fellow members of the committee for their preparedness to push the political boat so far out. The ACT can be justifiably proud of its progressive and transparent attitude to democracy, as well as its preparedness and bravery to be at the front of policy and parliamentary reform in Australia, showing the way and waiting for other jurisdictions to catch up.

However, I have no doubt that with this radical and complex departure from established practice, the ACT Legislative Assembly would be out on its own forever. No other Australian jurisdiction has gone anywhere near adopting the approach to staffing allocations recommended in this report, and—for at least the reasons I have outlined—none will. Nor should we.

MR BRADDOCK (Yerrabi) (4.56): I too would like to echo Mr Cocks and Mr Werner-Gibbings's comments of gratitude for working together on this particular inquiry, and the robust debate and interesting discussions that followed.

I appreciate Mr Werner-Gibbings's viewpoints although, with full respect, I do not come to the same conclusions.

There used to be a time when politicians voted on their own pay rises. This was totally accepted as being a thing in the Westminster conventions. That is, until someone came up with a radical, way-out idea that perhaps this was not appropriate—never mind the community outcry about this conflict of interest, which forced these Westminster governments and parliaments to accept the fact that there was a conflict of interest at play and that this needed to be addressed.

That is the argument I am presenting today; that one member in this place sets the staffing allocations for each and every other member in this chamber.

I am not drawing into question any actions of the current or former Chief Ministers in their discretion of utilising this power. What I am calling into question is the fact that there is a conflict of interest. That is what we need to address, and that is what this report tries to do. Because they have the power to set staffing allocations to the advantage or disadvantage of any member in this place.

We are not just talking about ACT public servants here; we are talking about Legislative Assembly and ministerial staff; staff who are there to assist the members in the performance of their duties. Now, I appreciate that Mr Werner-Gibbings's comments that these recommendations will cause the heat-death of the Westminster universe. I hope I have demonstrated through the fact that there can be change. It is entirely appropriate to remove the conflict of interest—for what was originally around our own pay, and now also about our own staffing allocations—to ensure that is done by an independent statutory office holder at an arm's length from the government and the parliament.

I do not believe that is so radical. Whilst Mr Werner-Gibbings is very carefully pointing

to comparison to other Australian jurisdictions, he is not comparing it to some of the international jurisdictions where they have recognised that it is not appropriate for the governing party to be setting the parliamentary staff for politicians. So, at its core, we are talking about this conflict of interest and managing that by allocating it to the Remuneration Tribunal.

Now, I will note there is an element of accountability in terms of the appropriation bills that do pass this place, which include a line item for the ACT executive, for the ministerial staff, plus also a separate appropriation bill for the Office of the Legislative Assembly as a whole. But this is not sufficient to address that conflict of interest, because parliamentarians in this place are only able to pass that bill, not pass that bill or decrease it. The problem being is you cannot separate out the different elements that make up each of those line items.

So, that is why I am calling for a process that is entirely separate from us here in the Assembly, to figure out what is the appropriate level of staffing.

I challenge any member of this place, in particular Mr Werner-Gibbings, to go out and ask members of his community, “Is it right for politicians to vote for our own pay?”

I am sure they will say the answer is “no”.

“Is it right for politicians to decide on the allocation of political staff in their office?” They will also say, “No.”

I am sure this pub test will apply in every jurisdiction. So, why do we accept the status quo when we know there is a conflict of interest that exists?

And I say, “but the feds do not do it,” is a non sequitur argument. Yes, they do do it, and there is regular criticism every time they do it. And even if they do it with the best of intentions, that political question hangs over each and every decision as to whether it might have been done for a political advantage or not.

Therefore, where the committee has explored an alternative approach that directly removes that conflict of interest and puts the decision-making in the hands of an independent body, you have to worry about the actual motives of dissent to that idea. Thank you.

MR COCKS (Murrumbidgee) (5.01), in reply: I want to make a few points in closing, in my personal capacity. Firstly, I would like to point out that the conflict of interest issues raised in this report are not just some matter of theory or philosophy. There is a real and direct effect that comes from these. Mr Speaker, I think you can see that most clearly when you look at the governing agreements that apply to this term of parliament.

The fact is that agreements around salary caps for staffing in crossbench members’ offices formed part of those agreements and was contained within those agreements, and they covered the entire crossbench, except for one member. This gives form to the concern raised within this report. Provision of staffing should never be part of the negotiation to form government. It is the clearest demonstration of that fundamental conflict of interest that I can see, without even having to go to some philosophical

concern or future risk.

I also need to address Mr Werner-Gibbings's dissenting report and his comments today. I do not bring the elegance to this place that Mr Werner-Gibbings brings, or to my language. I do not wear a waistcoat. I can barely keep my tie straight. I do not think in my life I have ever, before this minute, used the term "sui generis". But even I can see, fairly clearly, that there is something wrong with handing Mr Barr, or any Chief Minister, the power to set staffing budgets for the opposition and the crossbench, and have those commitments about staffing budgets, that are way above the opposition's, land in the governing agreements with the crossbench.

Mr Werner-Gibbings, in his comments, raised concern that, "Maybe the Remuneration Tribunal wouldn't be capable of considering the different roles in the Assembly." I am not sure that the current arrangements are doing a great job of that, either. There is certainly no acknowledgement or consideration of the role of a shadow minister, for example. There is no additional salary for the opposition even to be able to contend with the complexities of the legislation that the government brings forward.

That is a decision that the Chief Minister has made. I disagree with it. But I am not sure that the current arrangements are able to consider any more adequately the various roles across the Assembly than the Remuneration Tribunal would. The Remuneration Tribunal would be able to wear an independent hat. They would be able to bring that independent perspective that I think is desperately needed now.

Mr Werner-Gibbings does not seem to think that there is anything wrong with that. Mr Werner-Gibbings also does not seem to think that there is anything wrong with the Chief Minister controlling the number of political operatives that each Labor minister can employ in their executive offices. And let me be clear: we are not talking about public servants. We are not talking about people who have a responsibility to uphold public service values and codes of conduct. We are talking about people employed under the members' staffing act, as has already been pointed out.

I am not a lawyer and I am not a philosopher, but even I can see that there is something wrong with the Chief Minister being able to give himself as many political operatives as he wants and being able to decide how many fewer staff to give to those who may not have quite the degree of enamourment that Mr Werner-Gibbings seems to have for the Chief Minister. It is not just about the resources provided to the opposition, and it is not just about the resources provided to the crossbench. There is an inherent problem with the current arrangements that we have. As Mr Braddock has already pointed out, it fundamentally fails the pub test.

Of course, the other thing is that Mr Werner-Gibbings cannot seem to get his story or his thinking straight. To protect the Chief Minister's ability to control the opposition resources at the same time as giving generous multipliers to the crossbench, he argues that we should do nothing that goes beyond what any other jurisdiction in the country does. At the same time, he will stand in this place, with respect to anything that the government wants to take further than other jurisdictions, and he will argue that that is a good thing.

Where else in Australia do we see governing agreements that incorporate this sort of

arrangement? To be fair, where else in Australia do we have this sort of minority government, where we can actually productively work through and fix the systemic problems in the operation of our parliament? We have a unique opportunity, as we have a unique parliament.

I get it; Mr Werner-Gibbins wants to protect his Labor mates, and his report reads more like a bid for a future promotion than a real engagement with some of the issues. Frankly, transparency and accountability are absolutely an area that the ACT should be leading on. I am proud to have chaired and participated in the committee which has taken the first steps towards fixing what is clearly an inherent conflict of interest.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Environment and Planning—Standing Committee

Statement by chair

MS CLAY (Ginninderra) (5:07): Pursuant to standing order 246A, I wish to make a statement on behalf of the Standing Committee on Environment and Planning in relation to e-petition 5-26 and petition 11-26 concerning Draft Amendment 102 to the National Capital Plan—Hume Circle Precinct (Staffordshire Terrace).

These petitions were referred to the environment and planning committee on 5 February 2026 and relate to the National Capital Authority's proposal to amend the National Capital Plan to enable the renewal and redevelopment of the Hume Circle precinct in Canberra's inner south.

The proposal has generated significant community interest, regarding the scale of proposed densification, the capacity of existing infrastructure, traffic and safety impacts, potential effects on residents and local amenity, and the adequacy of consultation undertaken.

After careful consideration of the petitions and the government's response, the committee has resolved not to undertake a formal inquiry into the matter at this time, given that this committee has no authority to recommend to or direct the National Capital Authority and has no role in the statutory process for National Capital Authority land and decisions. However, the committee considers that the matters raised by petitioners warrant further examination and are of high interest to the people of Canberra.

Accordingly, the committee has resolved to seek a briefing from the National Capital Authority on Draft Amendment 102 and its plans for renewal of Hume Circle precinct, as well as on other NCA projects that have significant implications for the ACT and its residents. The committee will report back to the Assembly on the outcome of this briefing in due course.

Social Policy—Standing Committee

Statement by chair

MR EMERSON (Kurrajong) (5:09): Pursuant to standing order 246A, I wish to make a statement on behalf of the Standing Committee on Social Policy relating to its

consideration of e-petition 65-25: access to health services for Aboriginal people in the north of Canberra.

This petition was referred to the committee on 5 February 2026. The committee considered the petition at its private meeting on 20 May 2026, following the receipt of the government response.

The committee has resolved not to undertake an inquiry into the terms of the petition. When making this decision, the committee considered the ongoing engagement across the Assembly on this matter, as well as engagement between the ACT government and the federal government.

The committee recognises the importance of the issues raised in this petition and, while we are not undertaking an inquiry at this time, the committee will continue to monitor this issue closely.

City and Environment Legislation Amendment Bill 2026

Debate resumed from 25 March 2026, on motion by **Ms Cheyne**:

That this bill be agreed to in principle.

MS CASTLEY (Yerrabi) (5:10): I will not speak at length on this bill, simply because it is a fairly straightforward, uncontroversial piece of legislation. The bill makes changes to the rules for cemeteries and crematoria—quite important and necessary changes—as well as changes to the timing of redistributions and to the heavy vehicle and road transport rules. I am not aware of any concerns with any of these changes. The transport committee resolved not to undertake an inquiry, and the scrutiny committee had no real concerns, either. Obviously, the opposition will be supporting the bill.

Before I hand over the call, I want to make one small point. I know some members have concerns about the use of omnibus legislation in this place. I do not want to diminish their concerns in any way, but it is worth reflecting on the fact that this is an omnibus bill. It could have been split into five separate bills, two of which would have had just four lines.

This would have meant a number of additional reviews by the portfolio and scrutiny committees. It would have required quite a bit more chamber time, drafting time and consideration by each party and member in this place. I am not sure that we, the members of this place, or the broader community would have benefited in any way from this short bill being separated into five even shorter bills. While I respect the principle, my personal view is that omnibus legislation like this can be entirely appropriate, and we should keep that in mind when we are considering any changes to how this parliamentary process, when it comes to legislation, occurs.

MS CLAY (Ginninderra) (5.12): The Greens will be happy to support this bill.

MS CHEYNE (Ginninderra—Manager of Government Business, Attorney-General, Minister for Human Rights, Minister for City and Government Services and Minister for the Night-Time Economy) (5.12), in reply: Thank you, Ms Clay, for that

contribution. I appreciate it. If Mr Braddock does have something to say, I am happy to support leave being granted for him to speak, if needed, or to somehow have a debate on the detail—not that there is much to debate. I want to put on the record that it appears he has just been caught out, and that happens to the best of us.

I am pleased that we are debating this bill today. It is about supporting our government's commitment to a legislative framework that is responsive, transparent and fit for purpose. I thank members for their engagement in this debate and officials who have provided briefings. There is a revised explanatory statement, which I will table now. It simply seeks to create greater clarity of intent in response to some questions raised in the briefing, alongside a few brief comments made by the scrutiny committee.

Ultimately, this is a technical update to legislation within my portfolio responsibilities, both as the Minister for City and Government Services and in my capacity as Attorney-General. I acknowledge that there have been reflections made on omnibus bills, and that there can be disparate content in bills. I note Ms Barry's motion in the early May sitting week.

I do take on board the feedback that a bill like this is difficult, where responsibilities might be split between members or where several committees may have an interest. Certainly, we will see in the future where we can split bills sensibly. I think that anyone looking at this bill and the scale of the changes that are being made would be surprised if we had split it. Indeed, I suspect that, in another parliament, the government would have been accused of wasting people's time by having too many little, itchy bills.

This bill implements recommendation 3 of the ACT Electoral Commission's report on the ACT election by making a minor but ultimately significant amendment to the Electoral Act. By amending the commencement of public consultation from 24 to 25 months for the redistribution of electoral boundaries, the community will be afforded the time and opportunity to engage meaningfully in this process.

It makes amendments to the road transport legislation to keep the statute book contemporary and fit for purpose. It removes an obsolete reference to a provision of the Heavy Vehicle National Law that no longer exists. It removes a reference that has had an unintended consequence regarding our corporate vehicle multiplier, and it seeks to better reflect accuracy tolerance requirements for testing speed-measuring devices, making them stronger.

The most significant changes in the bill relate to the Cemeteries and Crematoria Act. They solidify the requirements of crematorium licensees for notification, collection and retention of cremated remains. They safeguard dignified storage and handling, and they prevent situations where uncertainty or miscommunication can compound a family's loss.

When I introduced this bill in March, Felicity Prideaux kindly gave her consent for me to share her story, because her story is the origin of this change. Felicity lives just over the ACT border. When Rob, her husband, died last year, he was cremated at Norwood Park. Felicity wanted Rob home with her as soon as the cremation was complete, and she waited for the call to say that his cremated remains were ready to be collected. That call never came. Weeks passed before a separate conversation alerted her that Rob's

remains should be ready. In fact, they had been ready for some time.

The fog of grief is real, Mr Speaker, and the burden of chasing the crematorium should never have fallen on Felicity. Norwood Park failed Rob, and it failed her.

When Felicity raised this with management at Norwood Park, she was given an explanation that I want to address again, thoroughly, on the record, today. She was told, in effect, that Norwood Park had been operating in accordance with the legislation; that they too wanted to see the legislation changed but had not been able to effect change yet, suggesting that the legislation was to blame.

I need to deal with that excuse and deflection directly, because it does not survive even a basic reading of the act. Section 25 of the act, as it stands today, requires the licensee of a crematorium to “tell the applicant that the cremated remains are available to be collected”. The timeframe set against that obligation is up to one year after the day of the cremation. That outer limit was never an instruction to take a year. It was never an instruction to remain silent for weeks, while a grieving widow waited for the phone to ring. It was a long-stop in the statute, intended for situations which might be unusual, where someone might be difficult to contact, not the standard of practice in ordinary situations.

Even on the most permissive reading of that long-stop, the operator did not meet it. Felicity was not notified within one year. She was not notified at all. Rob’s cremated remains were ready, in their care, and the call never came. That is not compliance with the act.

The other matter that demolishes their defence is this: the same section of the same act governs the other crematorium in our city, and that crematorium notifies families within one week as a matter of course. The same words, the same long-stop, the same statute book and the same law applies, yet there is a completely different practice. The legislation was not the impediment. Good business practice was the impediment.

I need to be plain about this—perhaps, in particular, for Mr Cocks’s benefit. It should not have been necessary to legislate this. I am not interested in regulation for regulation’s sake. I do not think that a seven-day notification for a bereaved family that their loved one’s remains are ready for collection should be novel, exotic, burdensome or unreasonable. I think it is what any competent and humane operator would already be doing and what another crematorium demonstrates they can already do. The fact that I am creating, with this bill, an offence provision to compel that conduct is, frankly, an indictment not of the legislative framework but of those whose conduct made it necessary.

In March, I told the Assembly that, after Felicity and I had spoken on radio on the morning of my speech, a large number of people contacted the station to say that Felicity and Rob’s experience had been their experience, too. That alone should have prompted some pretty serious reflection on the part of the operator. Since then, more Canberrans have made contact with me and my office. For all those families who reasonably expected to be told, were not told, and waited longer than necessary to collect their loved ones’ remains, this reform is for them, too.

Defensiveness is not accountability and deflection is not contrition. The instinct of this operator to push back against bereaved families rather than to listen and to learn is itself a serious matter. Further, I understand that there has been additional engagement, and that engagement requires me to respond to it, too.

The first is a suggestion from the operator that the changes that my directorate made to the code of conduct in January and the legislation before the Assembly today were the product of industry consultation rather than one person speaking up. That is not right. Felicity contacted me last November. I directed officials to act on the matter shortly afterwards. The brief updating the code of conduct was signed by me on 8 January this year, and the two ACT crematorium licensees were directly notified of the change later that month. That code change was the lighter touch, what I could do quickly, while we did the work on the primary legislation. That this Assembly is now being asked to put that same requirement into primary law with an offence attached tells members all they need to know about the fact that I did not feel that a lighter touch was going to be enough.

This bill was introduced in March, with Felicity in the gallery, and every step in that sequence was driven by her experience and her advocacy. Any account that says otherwise is not consistent with the documentary record.

The second is the suggestion that, because a form was signed at the time of cremation referencing that there was a particular collection window, the operator's obligation was thereby discharged. I need to be plain about this as well, Mr Speaker. A signature secured from a grieving widow or widower at the moment that they are making arrangements for their partner, their loved one, is not consent to silence in the weeks that follow. Fine print on an intake form signed in the fog of grief is not a substitute for a bloody phone call.

The whole point of the reform before this Assembly today is to place an active obligation on the operator who has the cremated remains in their care, not a passive expectation on the bereaved person, who is the least equipped in that moment to track timelines, re-read forms or chase a return call.

Anyone who has lost a loved one knows how significant the administrative burden is. Adding to that by having someone's remains waiting for a person who is bereaved to check if they are ready to be collected is not good enough.

That is why we are here, because absent an explicit statutory obligation, regrettably, some operators will treat a signature secured at the worst moment in a person's life as having extinguished further responsibility on their part.

One of the key objects of the Cemeteries and Crematoria Act is to recognise the rights of people to dignified and respectful treatment of human remains and the human remains of their loved ones. To remove any ambiguity, this bill amends section 25 to establish a legal requirement. The licensee must notify an applicant that cremated remains are available for collection within seven days of a completed cremation.

To facilitate this, there are amendments establishing an offence and amendments which update record-keeping provisions in line with the new required actions. If licensees fail

to comply with their obligations, the offence attracts 20 penalty units. This is a blunt measure, and it is a blunt measure made necessary by conduct that, quite honestly, should never have required it. It is not symbolic, though, and it is a practical reform, one with a clear obligation, timeframe and consequence.

Unfortunately, Felicity cannot be here today. She is in Scotland, but I know that she will be watching this. I certainly want to say, through you, Mr Speaker, to Felicity: I cannot undo what happened to you or the pain that you have carried because of it, but what I can do, and can do in partnership with you, is to change the law. That you not only recognised that change should occur but took action while grieving is a measure of the person that you are.

With that, I commend this very important bill to the Assembly.

MR BRADDOCK (Yerrabi) (5.26): I seek leave to make a brief statement.

Leave granted.

MR BRADDOCK: I appreciate the indulgence of all members. As Ms Clay has already mentioned, we Greens will be supportive of this bill. I will not go to the detail of the crematoria and cemeteries amendment because the minister has already gone through most of that in quite a lot of detail. I will say, though, that the handling of cremated remains sits at the intersection of law, dignity and human grief. Bereaved families engaging with these crematoria processes are often doing so at one of the most difficult times in their lives. So it is essential that the system operates with the utmost clarity, compassion and respect. These amendments seek to ensure exactly that. The proposed changes recognise the importance of allowing space and time for grieving and ensure that remains are always treated in a dignified and respectful manner.

In regard to the Electoral Act 1992, I am glad to see the electoral law amendment coming through this bill in a timely manner. This will allow Elections ACT to commence their redistribution work one month earlier, in September rather than October; thereby allowing them to get public consultation started before Canberra goes into its usual summer slowdown. This in turn will support Elections ACT in doing a good job with the redistribution. The change was recommended by Elections ACT themselves as what I would describe as a productivity improvement and has had, I think, consensus support right across the political spectrum.

On the road safety aspects of this bill, I would like to thank the minister for her revised explanatory statement and sharing it ahead of time, as this has greatly supported my colleagues and I in having clarity of the policy intent of the reform. The Heavy Vehicle National Law update effectively removes a risk of ambiguity which could have led someone to believe they do not have access to the mistake of fact defence in certain circumstances. They do under the reformed national law and our legislation will now reflect that.

For the corporate penalties on traffic infringements, it is clear that corporations will now have an incentive to identify drivers, which will in turn produce an incentive for drivers to take greater care on the road. I suggest that there is an additional corollary: corporations now have a greater disincentive to instruct drivers to ignore certain road

rules—and I welcome that. I would have actually liked it if it also applied to stopping and parking offences, especially for those massive electoral signage trucks that like to linger around polling booths at certain times—but we can leave that conversation for another time.

On speed camera calibration, I want to confess that this one was a bit tricky. I still struggle to see why a change to the law is required here. If a speed-measuring device needs to be accurate to within the more lenient of two criteria—being two kilometres per hour or two per cent—but is being tested to the stricter of those criteria in the circumstances, then that should not be a problem. That said, if anything this change is not particularly consequential, and the Greens are happy to trust that there is a good reason for this change which we are not fully across. Our concerns are not sufficient that we would need to oppose this part of the bill.

Ultimately, taken together, these amendments reaffirm that targeted, technical reforms can have meaningful, practical outcomes for our community. Whether it is ensuring dignity and clarity for grieving families, improving the administration of our electoral processes or strengthening fairness and accountability on our roads, this bill makes careful and considered improvements to our legislative framework. For that reason, we are pleased to support the bill.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Bill agreed to in principle.

Leave granted to dispense with the detail stage.

Bill agreed to.

Statements by members

Hands Across Canberra Fundraiser

MS CLAY (Ginninderra) (5.29): This is a quick heads-up to my fellow MLAs—and I am going to try to make this interesting by using as many slang terms for money as I can sensibly fit into a 90-second speech.

HelpingACT's long-time Mitsubishi Triton ute workhorse, known as Trudie, has suffered a setback and she needs the engine as well as the injectors replaced. Trudie is key to HelpingACT's service, delivering goods to those who need it as well as towing HelpingACT's food trailer, known as Foodie, around the region to provide hot meals for those who need them. Hands Across Canberra is looking to raise 20,000 dollarydoos to either repair Trudie or buy another workhorse. As of now, they have got about six grand, which is a good start, but not in the ballpark of the 20K they need.

To be honest, this is not just a heads-up; it is a call to action. I am cadging for moolah. I am chipping in a bit of my own lolly as well. I am going to match any future donations dollar for dollar to the amount of 5,000 smackeroonies, because I really believe in the great work that Mohammed and his team do and I want them to be able to keep doing it. He is here with us in the chamber today.

Would any of you like to join me? You could do a donation match, too, as individual MLAs; you could join together as a party room or you could simply leverage me out of my entire promised five grand by chipping in some spondulicks of your own. Have a chat, have a think, let me know and I can send you the donation link. We have to save Trudie and Foodie.

Menslink—Your Steps Matter

MR CAIN (Ginninderra) (5.31): In my younger years I was a bit of sprinter but I never tried stair climbing. Looking at the assembled athletes yesterday morning at Geocon Tower, High Society, I could see why I was not a stair climber or a stair runner. I want to thank the leadership of Geocon for hosting Your Steps Matter with Menslink yesterday morning at High Society, Tower B, in Belconnen. There were a lot of assembled teams of people. I was shocked by how many people were keen to run up to the top of a building of over 100 metres for the sake of breakfast, tea and coffee. But I think they were doing it for Menslink. So I really applaud them for doing that.

It was great to be there. I certainly was not there to participate. I was there to see who turned up and to wish them well. I am informed that the fastest teams can do the run up those stairs in less than three minutes. That just freaked me out a little bit. I thought, “Wow; how talented are they and how fit!” So thank you again to Geocon and Menslink. Menslink do fantastic work in our community and it is great to see them being supported.

Hughes—anniversary

MS CARRICK (Murrumbidgee) (5.32): On 9 May, I had the pleasure of attending a wonderful community event celebrating the 62nd birthday of Hughes. It was a beautiful autumn day, with a barbecue, community stalls, a local choir and a great turnout of local residents. The highlight was the unveiling of two beautiful new community murals—one created by talented local artists and the other by Geoff Filmer, who has done many fantastic murals around the city. The new one in Hughes highlights local faces and the spirit in the Hughes community. The MC was Michael Mulvaney, who was supported by passionate community members, like Jenny Tyrrell. Both Michael and Jenny feature on the mural of amazing community members. Thank you to everyone involved for such a fantastic day. And I look forward to continuing to represent and support this vibrant community.

Tibet—Panchen Lama—candlelight vigil

MR BRADDOCK (Yerrabi) (5.34): I want to thank the ACT Tibetan community for the privilege of being able to join them for a candlelight vigil last week to recognise the 11th Panchen Lama of Tibet. For those who might not be aware of the history here, on 17 May 1995, at just six years of age, Panchen Lama was basically taken into custody by the Chinese authorities and has not been seen in the public since. His matter remains a deep concern for the Tibetan community all around the world and right here in Australia.

The candlelight vigil was very important to help honour his life and raise awareness of his continued disappearance and to stand in solidarity with those advocating for

transparency, religious freedom and fundamental human rights. I was truly honoured to be in the presence of the community and praying with them in recognition that their religious leader has not been seen since he was six years of age and the impact that it has on them.

Birthday greetings

MR EMERSON (Kurrajong) (5.35): I would like to wish my Chief of Staff, Hannah Hughes, a very happy birthday. It would be remiss of me to fail to do so. We just enjoyed some cake, courtesy of Jack in my team—so Jack also deserves a shoutout. Of course, in classic chief of staff fashion, Hannah has not had a moment to celebrate her birthday today, but we will find time to do so. I want to extend my appreciation and acknowledgement to the incredible Hannah Hughes for all the amazing work that she does, which many members and their staff will be aware of and are in constant engagement with. So thank you to Hannah. Happy birthday.

Discussion concluded.

Adjournment

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

That the Assembly do now adjourn.

Mr John Needham—tribute

MS LEE (Kurrajong) (5.36): I rise today to pay tribute to John Needham, who passed away earlier this year. I acknowledge that present in the chamber today are members of John's family who have joined us: his son Sam; his partner Margaret, who is joining us online because she is a bit unwell; John's brothers, Christopher and Mark; and his sister-in-law Heather. Welcome. Thank you for being here. John was a man whose presence in the Canberra community was constant and deeply woven into the fabric of Griffith, in my electorate of Kurrajong, and I know many in the community are struggling to imagine life without him.

John was born in Melbourne, and he moved with his family to Canberra when his father started working for Defence. He studied accountancy, sociology and politics at the Canberra College of Advanced Education and began his career working at Old Parliament House for Tasmanian Labor Senator Ken Wriedt, who was the Leader of the Opposition in the Senate at the time. It was whilst he was working at Old Parliament House that he met his former wife, Jenny.

John was passionate about politics. It was something he engaged with throughout his life—reading widely, debating passionately and sharing ideas with anyone willing to listen. But it is through Mountain Creek Wholefoods at the Griffith shops that many came to know John. For more than 40 years, he devoted himself to that business. It was not just a job; it was his livelihood. He was there day in, day out—so much so that it is said that he only took two holidays that were longer than two weeks in all that time. That level of dedication is almost unimaginable today, but for John it was never about the hours. It was about purpose. Mountain Creek Wholefoods is not just a shop. Under

John's care, it became a gathering place, a place of trust and a cornerstone of the Griffith community. Customers did not just come to buy food; they came for conversation, for advice and for connection. John believed in what he sold. If a product was on his shelf, it was because he trusted it. He wanted people to feel that their health and wellbeing mattered more than profit. That integrity is what defined him.

There was always something new that John was trialling at the store, always a better product to find, a new idea to share and even sometimes something as simple as a tasty sultana. That curious nature extended far beyond business. John practised martial arts, earning black belts in both Karate and Aikido. He loved yoga, meditation and long walks. Even at 72, he embodied vitality and discipline in a way that inspired those around him, especially some of the younger generation. I am told that one of John's greatest joys was welcoming children from the local Bannister Gardens Preschool into his shop. He would show them how peanut butter was made, talk about seeds and connect them to the origins of the food they ate. For John, knowledge was something to be shared.

Then there was his love of politics. His son Sam recalls his dad showing him exactly which steps of Old Parliament House he stood on during the dismissal of the Gough Whitlam government and how, in his early career, John would work at Old Parliament House, run back from Old Parliament House to work in the shop and then run back to Old Parliament House. I think that image captures him perfectly—energetic, committed, and devoted.

It is often said that a person's legacy is measured in the lives they touch. By that measure, John's legacy is immense. In Mountain Creek Wholefoods he built more than a business; he built relationships. He created a space where people felt welcome, informed and valued—and he did so with kindness, integrity and a genuine love of life. There have been many reflections on John since his passing, but the words that resonate most deeply with me are those of his son Sam, and I will end with them:

...above anything else I can say about my dad, above his hard work and integrity, above his curiosity and his passion for life or his deep and extensive knowledge of politics, my dad was kind, he was a good man, and a very dear friend. The father I knew loved to laugh and joke, was endlessly supportive, and loved life. We all miss him more than I can possibly say.

I extend my sincerest condolences to Sam, to Margaret, Christopher, Heather, Mark and their families and many, many friends. John Needham was quite simply a good man. Canberra is better for his life and poorer for his passing.

Mr John Needham—tribute

MS STEPHEN-SMITH (Kurrajong—Minister for Health, Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Finance and Minister for the Public Service) (5.40): I also rise to acknowledge the life and contribution of John Needham, a man whose quiet dedication helped shape not only a beloved local business but also the culture and character of the Inner South, so much so that he was sometimes referred to as the “Mayor of Griffith”. For more than four decades, John was the heart and soul behind Mountain Creek Wholefoods at Griffith shops—a place that generations of Canberrans have known not

simply as a shop but as a community institution.

Long before wellbeing, sustainability and ethical consumption became mainstream ideas, John was living those values every day. Together with his wife, Jenny, and then his partner, Marg, he built Mountain Creek into something both personal and deeply local—a space where people felt listened to and welcomed. Anyone who has spent time in Mountain Creek Wholefoods will know that the atmosphere John helped create was one of warmth, mindfulness and human connection. You could walk in for a bag of rice or herbal tea and walk out having had a meaningful conversation about politics, health, philosophy or the meaning of life itself. That sense of connection mattered—and indeed still matters—to so many of my Kurrajong constituents. John understood something important about community: local businesses can become places of belonging; they can become anchors in people’s lives. And Mountain Creek became exactly that for countless Canberrans.

Born in Melbourne and later moving to Canberra, John worked in and around parliament in his younger years, as we have heard, including for Labor Senate leader Ken Wriedt. But it was in 1984 when he and Jenny took over Mountain Creek Wholefoods that he found what many would describe as his true calling. John poured himself into the business, as Ms Lee said. He handcrafted fittings from recycled timber, championed organic and fair-trade products before they were fashionable, and fostered a business culture grounded in care, curiosity and integrity.

Importantly, he never lost his interest in public life or social justice. Friends and family have spoken about his love of political discussion and his deep intellectual curiosity. He believed communities were strengthened when people genuinely engaged with one another, which perhaps explains why he was so pleased to see me and have a chat when I knocked on his door last year while out doorknocking in the local area, despite him being home due to having a cold. In many ways, John embodied the values we often speak about in this place: compassion, service and a commitment to sustainability and community connection.

Following his sudden death earlier this year, the outpouring of grief and affection from the Canberra community was truly extraordinary. John was only two months into a well-earned retirement after selling his beloved business. I popped into Mountain Creek to sign the memorial book a couple of weeks later and it was full of recollections, not so much of a businessman but a mentor, a listener, a neighbour and a friend.

The story of Mountain Creek is also part of the story of Griffith itself: community-focused spaces and the enduring village character that makes the Inner South so special. As a Member for Kurrajong, I know places like Mountain Creek help to give our suburbs identity and create relationships between people, and there is no better example of that than the collection of shops in Griffith.

To John’s family, including his son, Sam; his partner, Margaret; his brother, Christopher, and his wife, Heather; and his brother, Mark; and to his friends, colleagues and the wider Mountain Creek community, I extend my sincere condolences. John Needham leaves behind a remarkable legacy—one of kindness, wisdom and generosity. He will be remembered with great affection, and I hope the community he helped to build will continue to flourish for many years to come.

Mr John Needham—tribute

MR EMERSON (Kurrajong) (5.44): I too rise to speak to offer my condolences to the Needham family and to welcome them into the gallery here today. John Needham of Mountain Creek Wholefoods fame tragically passed early this year, as we have heard. I acknowledge the family members who are in the gallery and also watching online. John and his former wife, Jennifer Needham, took on Mountain Creek Wholefoods in 1984, providing bulk health foods, advocating for organic, healthy living and prioritising connections rather than transactions with their customers.

John was not only the face but also the heart and soul of Mountain Creek Wholefoods for over 40 years. He was ahead of his time. He was providing organic wholefoods before it was trendy, and I respect that, as someone who has jumped on the bandwagon since it has become trendy. He also walked the walk when it came to health, and we heard Ms Lee reflect on this: practising martial arts—a double black belt—yoga and meditation, taking walks, doing woodwork and eating well. I am also inspired to hear that he was running to and from work. Many of the timber features throughout the store were his work.

Not knowing John personally, though, I would like to read a statement on behalf of the Needham family. I thank Sam for providing the statement for us today. The statement reads:

We have had an outpouring of love since we lost John in January. People have reached out because he was a leader in their community, a mentor, a colleague, or the funny shopkeeper at Mountain Creek Wholefoods who was really proud of his sultanas. Some have even reached out because even though they only met him once, they were left with the impression of a man who was kind, generous, passionate, and who had a great capacity for love.

To his family he was all these things and so much more. He was loved as a father, a brother, a partner, and a very, very dear friend.

John lived his life with excitement and curiosity. He loved good food and good health, and dedicated over 40 years to building Mountain Creek, an icon of Griffith.

He always loved politics, as anyone who has spent longer than 5 minutes with him would know, often against their will. Before his life as a shopkeeper he served Australians as a researcher for Labor senator Ken Wriedt, and was there outside Old Parliament House when the legendary Gough Whitlam condemned the governor general.

He was an intellectually rigorous man who spent his life learning for its own sake. He felt that people in politics today would do well to look more critically at our political history, so that we can stop repeating the mistakes of those who came before us (his son Sam wants it to be known that no offence to present company is intended in this remark, though he cannot speak for his dad).

We know it would have meant a great deal to John to be honoured by this assembly, and his entire family wants to extend a truly heartfelt thanks to everyone present here today. There can be no doubt that John Needham left his mark on

Griffith, Canberra, and the people who were lucky enough to know him, forever.

Vale John Needham.

National Volunteer Week

MR CAIN (Ginninderra) (5.47): As members would know, last week was National Volunteer Week, from Monday to Sunday. It was a particularly important week for me. It always is an important week, but it was particularly important because it falls within my portfolio of shadow minister for community services. I was particularly keen to see what I could be involved in with our volunteer community groups and celebrations last week. I will touch on some of those in a little while.

I do not think there would be any disagreement in this Assembly that we all appreciate the wonderful work of volunteers in our city. In many ways, they are the backbone of our community. They give their time, skills and energy, and, being volunteers in an unpaid capacity, are obviously often unrecognised as well. In fact, many do not want the recognition; they just love contributing because they believe in helping others and making a difference, whether it is supporting local organisations, contributing professional expertise or just lending a physical hand to help something happen. Their impact reaches far beyond what we can all see. It is obviously a massive saving to government in many ways. They are service deliverers of many worthy programs in our community.

It would be remiss of me not to mention Volunteering ACT, the peak body that provides information educational material to our not-for-profit and community sector and programs for those who are suffering disadvantage or are isolated, as well as individuals with disabilities or mental health challenges. I want to acknowledge as well the work of the CEO of Volunteering ACT, Jean Giese, and the chair of the board, Sajid Hassan, and commend them on their work. I am sure they are going to continue to contribute massively to our community.

I will mention just three events that had a strong volunteering theme. I thank the Canberra division of Engineers Australia for hosting the Canberra Volunteer Week celebration breakfast on 20 May. They made that theme so strong with the contribution by guest speaker, Ms Genevieve Jacobs, who is the CEO of Hands Across Canberra. She is a well-known Canberra personality. She shared her thoughts on the power of volunteering, building strong communities, and the unique role that professional expertise, including engineering expertise, can play in contributing to our society. I acknowledge as well the wonderful emceeing of Lauren Hassall, an engineer and the Program Manager for KPMG; and Angela Harrison, the General Manager of Engineers Australia, who made some very fitting closing remarks.

In the afternoon that same day, I had the opportunity to go to Community Radio 2XX FM in the Griffith Centre. I thank Hedda Murray for the invitation. I was able to record a congratulatory message to Community Radio 2XX and the many volunteers supporting the important work over 50 years of operation. I look forward to attending their celebration of this 50-year anniversary on 6 June at the Canberra Museum and Gallery. Please make time to go there. There will be memorabilia, photos, and, I believe, a broadcast of my message and many other messages of thanks and well wishes for the

continued work of Community Radio 2XX.

On Sunday afternoon, I attended the Canberra Paws Walk and, unsurprisingly, ran into many people who were there as volunteers, being guides on the walks around the lake—a long walk and a short walk. Owners and their pets were doing the walk. I do not have a pet dog. I used to have a pet chicken, but we have moved beyond that at the moment, so we are pet-less in our home and I could not bring a pet to go for a walk. Volunteers abounded. The RSPCA, as the host organisation, was there as well. It was great to catch up with Michelle Robertson, the CEO, and wish them well with their important work.

Midwifery—continuity of care

MS CLAY (Ginninderra) (5.53): I spoke in this place a few months ago about Canberra's worryingly high C-section rate. An article in the *Herald Sun* on Tuesday showed that not only is the rate worryingly high; it is the highest in the country. Every other state and territory has a lower C-section rate than the ACT. This is appalling. In late 2024, according to questions on notice I asked, the number of women and birthing people accessing continuity of care was sitting at 23.4 per cent. The answer to a recent question taken on notice has come back, and that rate has fallen to 20 per cent. The government's Maternity in Focus strategy has a commitment to get us to 50 per cent by 2028, and we are going backwards.

At the same time, the functional design brief for the new north-side standalone birth centre has been partially released under FOI. I am really concerned that it looks like the new birth centre is planning to have only two beds. That is the same number they have now. This design brief has assumed that the number will be sufficient to 2041 and beyond. How is it that two beds will be enough to service our population when our population grows? How does this marry with the Maternity in Focus commitment that has expanded continuity of care?

If we want to expand continuity of care, we also need to expand the birth centre's capacity. How is this giving us a new standalone birth centre, as agreed, when it simply replaces the two-bed in-hospital facility that we already have? I have said it maybe hundreds or a thousand times here: place of birth matters. We need to invest more in birth centre beds, not just hospital beds. We need to invest in preventative health, like continuity of care. It is better for women and birthing people, better for their babies, better for midwives and, very importantly in our current fiscal situation, better for our budget. Midwifery-led continuity of care, the type that happens in a birth centre, has much lower rates of intervention.

We need to stop looking at our birthing services as if they are an ambulance at the bottom of a cliff. We are not going to shift that disturbingly high C-section rate that we currently have, which is getting worse, unless we do something different to what we are doing. We need to get the place of birth right, we need to offer women and birthing people a real choice, and we need that standalone birth centre with enough capacity to grow our targets.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

The Assembly adjourned at 5.55 pm.