



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

**DAILY HANSARD**

Edited proof transcript

10 June 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 **Wednesday, 1 July 2026**.

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**Wednesday, 10 June 2026**

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

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

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

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

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

### **Announcement of member to fill casual vacancy**

**MR SPEAKER:** The Clerk has been notified by the Electoral Commissioner that, pursuant to sections 189 and 194 of the Electoral Act 1992, Ms Rebecca Vassarotti has been declared elected to the Legislative Assembly for the Australian Capital Territory to fill the vacancy created by the resignation of Mr Rattenbury. I present a letter from the Electoral Commissioner to the Clerk, dated 5 June 2026:

Legislative Assembly for the Australian Capital Territory—Casual Vacancy—  
Declaration of the polls—Letter from the Electoral Commissioner, ACT Electoral  
Commission, to the Clerk, ACT Legislative Assembly, dated 5 June 2026.

The provisions of the Oaths and Affirmations Act 1984 require the oath or affirmation of a new member to be made before the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of the Australian Capital Territory or a judge of that court authorised by the Chief Justice.

### **Oath or affirmation of allegiance**

**MR SPEAKER:** In accordance with the provisions of the Oaths and Affirmations Act 1984, which requires the oath or affirmation of a new member to be made before the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of the Australian Capital Territory or a judge of that court authorised by the Chief Justice, the Hon. Lucy McCallum, Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of the Australian Capital Territory, will attend the chamber.

*The Chief Justice attended accordingly—*

### **Affirmation of allegiance by member**

*Ms Vassarotti was introduced and made and subscribed the affirmation of allegiance required by law.*

*The Chief Justice having retired—*

**MR SPEAKER:** Ms Vassarotti, on behalf of all members, welcome back.

## **Petitions**

*The following petitions were lodged for presentation:*

### **Braddon bowls club—petition 44-26**

*By Mr Braddock, from 649 residents:*

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

We, the undersigned, draw to the attention of the Assembly that the former Braddon Bowls Club site, opposite Ainslie primary school, was intended to serve as community, social and recreation space for the people of Braddon and Canberra.

However, a proposal is being considered for a six-storey hotel development on this land, which would permanently remove this land from community use.

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

- Ensure the former Braddon Bowls Club site is retained for community, social and recreation purposes.
- Pause the development application until an assessment of community needs can be undertaken such that any redevelopment consider building character and size, landscape, interface with the public domain and impact on traffic movement along Elder and Farrer Streets.

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

### **Gungahlin—cinema—petition 16-26**

*By Mr Braddock, from 236 residents:*

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

The residents of the ACT draw the attention of the Assembly to the delivery of the long-promised Gungahlin Cinema. A cinema for the Gungahlin Town Centre was first proposed more than a decade ago, with the ACT Government releasing land at the corner of Efkarpidis Street and Hinder Street specifically for this purpose in 2012.

Despite repeated assurances and multiple development announcements, the project has faced continual and avoidable delays. The developer originally indicated construction would commence in 2020, yet no meaningful progress has occurred.

For years, there seems to be no progress between ACT government and developers but has been repeatedly stonewalled, resulting in a barren, fenced-off block in the heart of the Gungahlin Town Centre. Gungahlin is one of the fastest-growing

regions in the ACT, yet remains the only major town centre without a cinema.

Residents continue to be disadvantaged by the lack of local entertainment infrastructure, despite more than a decade of unmet commitments. Community frustration has grown as the promised cinema has now been delayed for over 12 years, with no clear timeline for delivery.

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

1. Urgently investigate and publicly report on the causes of the prolonged delays in the Gungahlin cinema development;
2. Explore all available mechanisms including planning, contractual, or legislative options to ensure the developer meets their obligations or that alternative pathways are pursued;
3. Commit to a clear, enforceable timeline for delivering a cinema in the Gungahlin Town Centre;
4. Ensure transparent communication with the Gungahlin community regarding progress, obstacles, and government actions taken to resolve the issue;
5. Gungahlin residents deserve equitable access to cultural and entertainment facilities, and that the continued inaction on this project is inconsistent with the ACT Government's stated commitment to building cohesive, liveable communities; and
6. Take regulatory compliance action to enforce the lease conditions for the Gungahlin cinema site.

### **Mawson—playing fields—petitions 86-25 and 55-26**

*By Ms Carrick, from 153 and 37 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 that the existing path at the north-eastern corner of the Mawson Playing Fields is not meeting the needs of the community.

The existing path involves a steep climb up to a sharp corner at Heard Street. This steep climb is challenging for many path users, and the sharp corner is adjacent to the kerb and unsafe for bicycles. The path is also in poor condition and is too narrow to support all types of users. Over many years the community has indicated its clear preference by creating a desire line path along the tree line. This desire line path avoids both the sharp corner and the steep climb on the existing path.

Your petitioners, therefore, request the Assembly to call on the ACT Government to construct a shared path, at least 3 metres wide and with lighting, along the desire line across the north-eastern corner of the Mawson Playing Fields, to connect the shared path from Farrer with the path at the corner of Heard Street and Mawson Place.

### **Roads—safety—Plimsoll Drive, Casey—petition 36-26**

By **Mr Braddock**, from 60 residents:

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

The following residents of the ACT draw the attention of the Assembly to the dangerous state of Plimsoll Drive in Casey which is risking our safety.

School children are unsafe walking along a road with limited crossings, overgrown vegetation that blocks drivers' vision, unfixed potholes, and frequent 'brown outs' in the lighting.

Additionally, roadkill is common on this road where it could be prevented. It's important to note all of these issues are compounded by the frequent honing behaviour regularly exhibited on this stretch of road.

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

1. Install speed bumps along the road, including near the Casey Recreational Playground;
2. Install clearer speed signs;
3. Prune overgrown vegetation and trees that obscures drivers' sight, including at the intersection of Plimsoll Drive and McGovern Street; and
4. Urgently fix outstanding potholes.

**Mawson—community facilities—petitions 85-25 and 54-26**

By **Ms Carrick**, from 137 and 255 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 that there is no community hall at Southlands in Mawson.

Community halls provide a space for people to gather and hold events, fostering social connections and promoting good mental health. As the major centre for southern Woden, it is critical that Southlands has a hall and other community facilities. The site west of Southlands Tennis Club and north of Mawson Playing Fields is a suitable site, well-located between the shops and playing fields and close to parking and paths.

The existing car park could be moved to the west of the site to avoid any loss of car parks. Facilities that could be located at this site include:

- A community hall, incorporating a men's shed, and a community garden.
- A barbecue and shaded seating facilities, with space for food trucks.
- A basketball hoop and children's playground.

Your petitioners, therefore, request the Assembly to call on the ACT Government to rezone the eastern portion of section 47, block 26 in Mawson for community facilities.

## **Canberra Institute of Technology—senior fitness programs—petitions 45-26 and 53-26**

*By Mr Cain, from 625 and 183 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 the long-standing senior fitness programs at CIT Bruce have been cut back despite strong demand, and have supported the health, rehabilitation and social wellbeing of hundreds of older Canberrans for over a decade; that many classes are already full, with waiting lists; that recent changes have reduced classes, removed an entire day of access, cut higher-level and yoga sessions, and eliminated weekend gym access; that participants include seniors managing chronic illness and recovering from significant medical events; that these programs provide proven preventative health and social benefits that reduce isolation and support healthy ageing, at a time when the ACT Government is promoting healthy ageing; that there are few, if any, realistic and affordable alternatives in Canberra offering the same level of appropriate, higher-intensity exercise in a safe group setting for older people; and that these changes will force many older Canberrans to lose a vital part of their weekly health and social routine.

Your petitioners, therefore, request the Assembly call on the ACT Government to immediately reverse the cuts, restore all classes and gym access, provide proper consultation, and guarantee long-term funding for senior fitness programs.

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

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

### **Ministerial response**

The following response to a petition has been lodged:

#### **Belconnen—R2 and R3 buses—petition 83-25**

**Mr Steel**, Minister for Transport, dated 5 June 2026, in response to a petition lodged by **Ms Clay** on 26 March 2026 concerning R2 and R3 bus routes for West Belconnen.

*The response read as follows:*

Dear Mr Duncan

Thank you for your letter dated 26 March 2026, in regard to responding to Petition E-PET-083-25, lodged by Ms Jo Clay MLA to keep the R2 and R3 bus routes for West Belconnen.

In February 2026 Transport Canberra introduced the updated ‘construction’ bus network and timetable in response to the National Capital Authority’s (NCA)

Commonwealth Avenue Bridge Renewal Project. Although not all bus services travel via Commonwealth Avenue, adjustment of the whole bus network was required to reflect the impact of increased travel times for buses across the city due to these works.

Transport Canberra built the updated network and timetable on the modelled impact of the NCA's bridge closure to maintain the reliability of bus services across the city. The updated network was also designed to keep Canberra moving during the bridge renewal works by protecting core frequencies, prioritising key corridors, and ensuring we could maintain key routes across the city.

The Rapid 2 and 3 routes are some of the longest routes in the network, therefore were particularly susceptible to impact of delays. Therefore, the decision was made to temporarily modify these routes to terminate at Belconnen, with two new local services (Route 12 and Route 13) to replace part of the routes west of the Westfield Belconnen interchange, to mitigate the ripple effect of these delays out to Fraser or Spence, and back.

The ACT Government acknowledges the issues raised in petition E-PET-083-25 and notes the views expressed by the petitioners. Transport Canberra has been closely monitoring real word traffic network impacts and the operation of the 'construction' bus network since February to inform network updates, which will prioritise the reinstatement of the full R2 and R3 routes and improvements to other, highly patronised Rapid services.

On 11 May 2026, Transport Canberra announced an updated network, and timetable would commence from Monday 20 July, to align with the start of Term 3, will include the following improvements to Rapid bus services:

- reinstating the full R2 and R3 routes through to West Belconnen (and discontinuation of the temporary, replacement Route 12 and Route 13 local services);
- an increase in the frequency for R4 and R5 services from Tuggeranong; and
- an increase in frequency for R6 services from Woden.

This update builds on timetable refinements introduced in April, which focussed on minimising the early running of some bus services, and will also include some more minor refinements to local and school services to better reflect actual travel conditions. Updated timetables and school information packs will be made available for the community before the end of school term 2 in June 2026.

Whilst Transport Canberra considers the diversion of services in determining how to respond to changing traffic conditions, including the Commonwealth Avenue Bridge Renewal Project works, diversion of the Rapid 4 along the Parkway has not been considered. The Rapid 4 and Rapid 5 work together to manage service demand between Canberra's south and the City. Diversion of Rapid 4 would increase patronage pressures on existing R5 services, as well as reducing connection and service options for passengers utilising missed stops such as Albert Hall (Parkes) and Melrose Drive (Lyons).

The ACT Government is committed to delivering a reliable and responsive public transport network to keep Canberrans moving around our city during these major

infrastructure works, and will continue to consider service improvements where feasible.

Thank you for raising this matter. I trust this information is of assistance.

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

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

That the petitions and response so lodged be noted.

### **Roads—safety—Plimsoll Drive, Casey—petition 36-26 Gungahlin—cinema—petition 16-26**

**MR BRADDOCK (Yerrabi) (10.08):** I wish to talk to the two petitions which are very local and of great importance to the members of the community: the longstanding absence of a cinema in Gungahlin and the ongoing safety concerns of Plimsoll Drive in Casey.

The first petition, being the dangerous state of Plimsoll Drive, reflects the real and immediate concerns of Casey residents. The combination of preventable hazards is putting community safety at risk. Residents have raised, repeatedly, concerns with me about limited safe crossings for children, overgrown vegetation obstructing drivers' vision, unfixed potholes and inconsistent street lighting. These issues create a derelict environment that compromises the safety of Casey residents and passers-by, particularly our most vulnerable.

These risks are further compounded by frequent reports of hooning behaviour along this stretch of road. When excessive speed intersects with poor visibility, degraded road surfaces and inadequate lighting, the consequences can be serious for pedestrians and motorists alike. The frequent occurrence of roadkill in the area is evidence of unsafe conditions that need to be addressed.

This petition sets out a series of straightforward and achievable solutions. It calls on the ACT government to install speed bumps along Plimsoll Drive, particularly near the Casey Recreational Playground, intended to slow traffic in high-risk areas. It calls for clearer speed signage to reinforce safe driving behaviour; for the pruning of overgrown vegetation to improve visibility, especially near the intersection of Plimsoll Drive and McGovern Street; and for the urgent repair of long-lasting potholes. These are sensible, targeted measures that would make a tangible difference to community safety for Casey residents.

Here in the ACT, we can and should act on these concerns to ensure our suburban streets are safe for everyone—particularly when these issues disproportionately affect children struggling to cross roads on their way to school or members of the community with accessibility needs struggling to exit their homes due to neglect of the streets around them.

I urge the ACT government and this Assembly to implement the measures outlined in this petition without delay. I would also like to acknowledge my constituents who have brought this issue forward—in sending my office emails and communicating so openly

and constructively. I would like to thank them for their advocacy. I commend the petition to the Assembly.

Turning now to the second petition, which we have spoken about at length in this chamber multiple times, it speaks to a longstanding issue that has deeply frustrated much of the Gungahlin community: the failure to deliver a long-promised cinema in the town centre. Land for this development was released in 2012, specifically for this purpose, yet more than a decade later, the project remains unrealised despite repeated assurances and announcements.

What was intended to be a key piece of community infrastructure has instead become a symbol of delay and inaction. Construction was at one point expected to begin in 2020, but no meaningful progress has followed. Instead, residents are left with a vacant, fenced-off block in the heart of one of Canberra's fastest-growing regions. Gungahlin remains the only major town centre without a cinema, undermining the otherwise self-contained, liveable and socially thriving community that is Gungahlin. After more than 12 years, community frustration is entirely justified. This issue is no longer simply about a delayed project; it is about accountability, confidence in planning processes and the delivery of promised infrastructure.

The petition reflects this frustration while setting out a clear and constructive path forward. It calls on the ACT government to urgently investigate and publicly report on the causes of these delays; to explore all available mechanisms to ensure the developer meets their obligations, or that alternative pathways are pursued; and to commit to a clear and enforceable timeline for delivery. It also calls for transparent communication with the community and for regulatory action to enforce the lease conditions associated with the site. These are reasonable and necessary steps to restore confidence and ensure that commitments made to growing communities are honoured.

Here in the ACT, we must ensure that key community infrastructure is delivered and that town centres are not left with vacant sites for over a decade. I urge the government and this Assembly to act on this petition and prioritise the delivery of a cinema for Gungahlin. I will note the Minister for Planning has previously assured the Assembly that they are reviewing the planning regulations, which at the moment mean there is a nil penalty for developers for the first four years of noncompliance with their lease conditions. I urge the government progress this as a matter of priority, as this is undermining community confidence in the planning process.

In closing, I would like to acknowledge the residents, community advocates and Gungahlin Community Council who have sustained attention on this issue for so many years. Your persistence is vital in advocating for the people of Gungahlin. I commend this petition to the Assembly.

**Gungahlin—cinema—petition 16-26**

**Mawson—playing fields—petitions 86-25 and 55-26**

**Mawson—community facilities—petitions 85-25 and 54-26**

**MS CARRICK** (Murrumbidgee) (10.13): I rise to speak about the petition to rezone land for a community centre at Southlands, and to briefly address the Mawson playing

fields park and the Gungahlin cinema petition.

Southlands in Mawson is the primary commercial centre for southern Woden, offering a wide range of shops and services. What it does not have, however, is a dedicated community facility, a place where people can come together outside of the licensed club. That gap is significant. Community facilities are not just nice to have; they are essential. They foster social connection, reduce isolation and support mental health and wellbeing. They are the spaces where communities are built. As more people move into the area, we must ensure we are building the social infrastructure that makes neighbourhoods liveable and connected.

This petition makes a simple and sensible request to rezone a small parcel of land next to the Southlands Tennis Club to secure space for a future community centre. The site is well located, linking the shops with the Mawson playing fields. The existing car park could be relocated west without losing valuable parking for local businesses. This is a modest but meaningful proposal: a community hall that could support mothers groups, seniors groups, youth activities, and men's and women's sheds. It could also include a community garden, shaded seating, barbecue areas and simple recreational spaces like a basketball hoop and a playground.

These are the sorts of facilities that can bring people together, enabling the social connections that we know are critical to the wellbeing of our local communities. As densification increases, we must balance growth with social infrastructure. If we fail to reserve land now, we risk creating denser suburbs that are less connected and less resilient. I urge the government to support this petition and take the first step by rezoning the land.

The Mawson playing fields path petition is also about promoting community connections. The path at the north-eastern corner of the playing fields, which forms part of the pedestrian route from Farrer to Southlands, involves a steep climb up to a sharp corner at Heard Street, which is challenging for many path-users and unsafe for bicycles. This route is well used, particularly by residents of the nearby Goodwin, Farrer and Dyraaba Court retirement villages and by students cycling to school.

Over many years, the community has shown its clear preference for a shorter, flatter, safer route by creating a desire line path along the tree line across the north-eastern corner of the playing fields. Formalising this desire line into a properly designed shared path with adequate width and lighting would significantly improve accessibility and safety. As upgrades to Southlands proceed, the connections to and from the centre must be improved as well.

Finally, I support the Gungahlin cinema petition. Our town centres should be vibrant destinations with a mix of retail, dining and entertainment. Cinemas still offer shared experiences that people value, and the Gungahlin community has waited long enough. Good planning is about more than buildings: it is about people, connection and liveable communities.

### **Braddon bowls club—petition 44-26**

**MS VASSAROTTI** (Kurrajong) (10.16): I would like to speak on the petition around

the development of the former Braddon bowls club. The other week, I stood alongside everyday working people—teachers, public servants and local north Canberra residents—who gathered at the historic Braddon bowls club. They came together to stand in opposition to yet another corporate developer pulling rank in their neighbourhood.

In listening to these community members, one undeniable truth became crystal clear: our community is fed up. They are sick to death of developers with deep pockets that aim to wear down a local community, and governance that consistently prioritises corporate profit over people and private developers over public good. Let me be perfectly clear: I support smart, sustainable infill development. But sustainable development does not mean taking a sledgehammer to our suburbs without a second thought. It does not mean greenlighting development that makes no effort to take into account the streetscapes around it or the communities that will be there long after the developers have moved on. It certainly does not mean steamrolling over the very people who live there.

Because, as it stands, this development is of a scale and nature that is completely out of step with the rest of the neighbourhood. It will significantly impact on the local neighbourhood school, and it will completely block out the sun from the neighbouring much loved and utilised clay tennis courts. When deprived of sunlight, the fact is, these clay courts will become an unviable community facility; they will attract mould, algae and reduce the effectiveness as a court.

One wonders why our community must fight so hard for the basic stuff. Not long ago, we were promised a new planning system. We were promised an end to these exhausting, block-by-block battles. But instead, we are seeing more of the exact same stuff, just in a different form. More and more, we are seeing proponent-initiated amendments to the Territory Plan and proposed developments that go wildly beyond community expectations.

We are seeing development applications slip through during holiday periods to avoid scrutiny. We are seeing community consultation turned into box-ticking exercises where local voices are completely ignored. More and more, we are seeing that the government and the independent Planning Authority are rolling out the red carpet for massive, hyper-profitable developments. And what does the community get in return? Nothing—no public housing, no community infrastructure; seemingly, just more corporate profit.

What does give me hope is that this community is fighting back. People from all walks of life are coming together, organising and drawing up a better vision for our city. I congratulate the people of Kurrajong for their valiant efforts in getting the number of signatures that this petition has received. The collective action is exactly how we reject poor governance, exactly how we draw a line in the sand and exactly how we build a future for and with our community. I commend the petition to the Assembly.

### **Canberra Institute of Technology—senior fitness programs—petitions 45-26 and 53-26**

**MR CAIN** (Ginninderra) (10.20): I rise this morning to speak regarding the “Save

senior fitness programs at CIT Bruce” petition. I want to acknowledge all of the supporters of this petition and thank them for their support, particularly Mr Brian Garratt who is in the chamber gallery as well.

This concerns the cuts to the senior fitness program at CIT Bruce. I do also want to acknowledge Minister Pettersson for arranging a briefing for me last week with representatives from CIT, including a member of the board. And I note correspondence I have received from the minister dated last week and received last week, and I quote his lead: “Thank you for your correspondence of 1 April 2026 about the proposed changes to senior fitness programs at the CIT Bruce.”

These cuts are very concerning and obviously very concerning to the 625 petitioners who signed the online petition and the 183 who signed a paper version of that same petition. Again, I want to thank Mr Garratt in particular and all his supporters for organising so many signatures on the paper version of this petition.

The Assembly has already heard that these programs are not just recreational but are essential to the health, rehabilitation and social wellbeing of older Canberrans. But what we are seeing now goes beyond cuts to these programs. In just the past two weeks alone, participants have received two separate communications from CIT, and on 25 May, late last month, a request for volunteers to assist in the assessment of certificate III students who are training to become entry-level instructors. And then not long after that correspondence, there was a notification that all three fitness classes scheduled for that day were going to be cancelled. So there has been some concerning disparity and contradictions in correspondence provided to participants and those who do the training. There are about 40 students currently studying fitness instruction at CIT, the majority at certificate III level, with a smaller number at certificate IV. These students do depend on these real classes for their own training and experience. Cutting these classes affects them.

But, in particular, cutting these classes has deeply affected the seniors who have loved coming to these programs and have loved coming together as a community and in fellowship to enjoy some physical activity together. Mr Speaker, you would think any government policy that addresses the seniors in our community would actually have as an absolute priority encouraging them to have opportunities to engage in healthy and recreational and exercise activities. This is such a contradiction of such an important policy, a policy that any responsible government should be triumphing. This is a failure, Mr Speaker.

At the briefing we had a very energetic discussion about the program, and I followed up with questions to the minister’s office to which I have not really received answers yet. I have not received answers to very particular questions. How much money is being saved by these cuts? What is the long-term plan for a health policy from this government that particularly has our senior community in mind? I look forward to those answers, and I will be saying more about this issue when I do receive those.

With so much support coming from our senior community, and so much opportunity for them to be recognised and encouraged to be part of the full community of the ACT, I am very disappointed that this program has been cut, as are those in this gallery and as are those who signed this petition—over 800. And I am sure there are many, many

more out there who are happy to see the senior community in our city have a voice in this place, and of course the role of the petition is one way that our community can do that. I do urge the government to reconsider its decision and to restore these cancelled classes and guarantee their long-term funding.

**Belconnen—R2 and R3 buses—petition 83-25  
Canberra Institute of Technology—senior fitness programs—petitions  
45-26 and 53-26**

**MS CLAY** (Ginninderra) (10.25): I first of all thank Mr Cain for bringing the Bruce CIT petition forward and thank the residents for raising this important issue. It is really good to see these voices elevated, and it is a shame to see services cut that people really value. I also want to speak about the government response to a petition about other service cuts—the R2 and R3, which were removed from West Belconnen. This petition was brought forward by Danny Hunterford and it received 1,685 signatures in a pretty short space of time.

People in here will probably remember the issue. Government had to make some changes and decided that they would remove both of the Rapids from West Belconnen—an area that services around 50,000 people in Canberra. People in West Belconnen and Belconnen were pretty horrified at this decision. I am really pleased to see that the transport minister has restored these services. These services will be returning on 20 July. Other improvements to the network are also being made. We are deeply grateful in Belconnen and West Belconnen to have our Rapid services restored. I note that we lost them for six months.

I am very much hoping that people have not changed their travel habits permanently. I know quite a lot of people were affected by this. There has been a lot of quick decision-making and changed decision-making. Local buses were put on, and local buses got full and needed to be increased. It was not a smooth journey. It shows why decisions like that to cut off a region from standard services should not be made lightly. In future, the people of West Belconnen would probably request that we not have transport cuts. It is an area that desperately needs transport and services. We are pleased that they will come back, and I thank the transport minister for doing the work to make sure that they will be restored on 20 July.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

**Statement by member**

**MS CASTLEY** (Yerrabi) (10.28), by leave: As members would be aware, last week I announced my resignation from the Canberra Liberals. There has been extensive reporting about my reasons for leaving, and I do not see any need to rehash what is already on the public record, but I do want to say thank you. I want to say thank you to the many people who have reached out to express their support and their sympathy. I expected there would be some negative feedback, and clearly some people still think the way to do politics is with abuse and false accusations, but I did not expect there would be so much support and positive feedback. People from all over Australia have reached out. It has been really touching and I thank everyone who took the time to come by the office or get in touch. But this statement is not about the past; it is about the

future. My plan for the rest of this term is to play an active and constructive role in this place in support of the things that my local community elected me to do. That means a focus on Yerrabi and standing up for our community's values and the things that directly impact people's lives.

Finally, I note that my move affects the composition of the chamber. The government can now pass legislation with the support of the crossbench, and it is no longer possible for the opposition and the Greens to pass motions on their own. The opposition leader already spoke for me and said my voting behaviour will not change very much now I am on the crossbench. I would like to speak for myself and tell you that is not the case. If any of you have a motion, an amendment or an issue where you would like my support, my door is open. I do not care what colours you wear or what logo is on your corflute. If you can show me that something is good for Yerrabi, that it is consistent with my values or helps to build a better Canberra, you can expect me to work constructively and respectfully with you. And I will back you in. That is what I am here for, that is what my community expects, and that is what I will deliver.

## **Levies and taxation—stamp duty**

### **Ministerial statement**

**MR BARR** (Kurrajong—Chief Minister, Minister for Economic Development and Minister for Tourism and Trade) (10.30): I rise this morning to update the Assembly on the territory's long-term reform of stamp duty and its significant role in improving housing affordability, boosting supply and expanding access to home ownership, particularly for first home buyer owner-occupiers.

This reform journey began in 2012-13, in my very first budget as Treasurer. It has been grounded in decades of consistent economic advice and expert review. It is a reform that has certainly required persistence and discipline, but it is a reform that is now well advanced. We are approximately two-thirds of the way through the transition away from inefficient, volatile transaction taxes and towards a fairer, more stable system based on general rates. That progress matters, but, equally, it underscores that there is more work to do. We remain committed to completing this reform and to ensuring that its benefits continue to be directed where they are most needed: towards owner-occupiers and towards those seeking to enter the housing market for the first time.

The case for this reform has been made repeatedly over many years, including by me, but let's recap. The Henry tax review, back in 2010, identified conveyance duties as amongst the most inefficient taxes in Australia. The Productivity Commission has highlighted their distortive impact on housing mobility and economic efficiency. The Grattan Institute, along with countless academic economists and policy experts, has called for their replacement with broad based land taxes. Over decades, the message has been consistent, clear and persistent: abolish stamp duty, reduce barriers to movement in the housing market and improve the functioning of the housing market.

To understand why reform is necessary, we must be clear about the role our tax system plays in shaping housing outcomes. Stamp duty on housing, in its current form, works against many of the objectives governments are seeking to achieve. It imposes a substantial up-front cost at the point of purchase—often tens of thousands of dollars—which acts as a significant barrier for people trying to enter or move within the housing

market. This has real and practical consequences. It means young families delay purchasing a home that better suits their needs, it means older Canberrans think twice before downsizing, even when their current home no longer fits their stage of life, and it means workers are less able to relocate for employment opportunities that would otherwise strengthen our economy.

In economic terms, this is what is known as a “lock-in effect”. Put simply, stamp duty discourages mobility. When people cannot move freely, housing is not used as efficiently as it should be. We see larger homes underutilised in some parts of the market while, in others, households face overcrowding or limited choice, and this mismatch puts pressure on both prices and rents, ultimately making housing less affordable.

There is also a broader fiscal challenge. Stamp duty is an inherently volatile revenue source. It can rise strongly in times of high transaction activity and increasing prices, but it can fall away just as quickly when the market slows. That volatility makes it harder to plan and invest with confidence in the infrastructure and services that our growing community needs. A more sustainable approach is to shift away from transaction taxes like stamp duty and towards a broader, fairer and more consistent property tax base.

By spreading the tax burden over time rather than concentrating it at the point of purchase, we lower one of the most significant barriers to entering the housing market. This makes it easier for people, particularly first home buyers, to take that first step. At the same time, a recurring land based tax better reflects the value of land, which is shaped not just by the individual owner but also by the collective investments we make as a community, through infrastructure, planning decisions and public services. Importantly, this approach does not penalise people for moving. Instead, it supports a more dynamic housing market where homes are more likely to be occupied by those who need them most.

This is also a matter of fairness. Our current system places a disproportionately large burden on those at the point of purchase—often younger households and new entrants—while others who hold property for long periods may contribute less over time. This reform helps distribute that responsibility more evenly. The economic case for change is clear: moving away from stamp duty and towards a fairer and more efficient system improves mobility, makes better use of our housing stock, supports affordability and provides a more stable and sustainable revenue base for the territory.

Understanding this economic reality is critical because it points to the need for reform. But reform cannot happen in one budget, and that is why the government is continuing to progress a long-term program of tax reform designed to improve affordability, strengthen the territory economy and support a fairer system for all Canberrans. At the centre of our reform has been a sharp and sustained focus on first home buyers because, for first home buyer owner-occupiers, stamp duty has never been an abstract economic concept; it has been a real and immediate barrier—a large up-front cost that either delays or sometimes denies completely entry into the housing market.

That is why, over 14 successive budgets, we have systematically reduced those up-front costs, and it is why, from 1 July 2026, first home buyer owner-occupiers in the ACT

can purchase a home without paying any stamp duty at all. This means that a first home buyer in the ACT needs to save \$10,000 less for a property worth \$850,000 and nearly \$40,000 less for a property worth \$1 million than a home buyer in New South Wales, significantly reducing the time it takes to save for a deposit and enter the property market. We have removed property value thresholds that once constrained choice and access, and we have delivered full duty exemptions that remove one of the largest up-front financial hurdles facing new entrants. So, 15 years into this tax reform journey, this is a structural reform that is complete for this cohort, delivering practical outcomes, and we are seeing the results.

Recent data shows that first home buyers are accounting for a larger share of housing market activity in the territory than in previous years. Recent federal government policy directions in this budget and previously are also supporting this. It is not accidental; it reflects the cumulative impact across both levels of government of reducing entry costs and targeting assistance effectively. What it means in practical terms is that more Canberrans are getting their foot in the door, more renters are able to make the transition to ownership, and more young households are building their future in this city. It is precisely what the reform was intended to achieve.

But we know tax reform alone does not deliver affordability. We must remain focused on housing supply. Here again, the territory is acting. We are seeing a significant shift in the form of new housing being delivered, particularly the growth in what is referred to as the missing middle: townhouses, terraces and low-rise multi-unit developments. These housing types are critical. They are more affordable than detached houses, they are well-suited to first home buyers, they make more efficient use of land, and they support more diverse, inclusive and sustainable communities.

If we are serious about affordability, we must provide more options, and the missing middle does exactly that: it expands choice, it lowers entry costs and it aligns with the needs of a changing population. Our tax reform reinforces this supply agenda. By reducing stamp duty, we improve mobility, we free up existing housing stock and we enable better matching between households and dwellings. By lowering up-front costs, we support demand for more modest and more affordable housing types, particularly among first home buyers. By shifting to a more stable revenue base, we create the fiscal capacity to invest in the infrastructure that unlocks new development. This is how all the pieces fit together. This is how tax reform supports supply.

Our approach is strongly aligned with national policy. The commonwealth government have placed support for first home buyers at the centre of their agenda, through investment in social and affordable housing, through support for new construction and through broader fiscal and tax settings that support young Australians to enter the market. There is now a clear and growing national consensus: we must increase supply, reduce barriers and improve the efficiency of the housing system. The ACT's reform program is entirely consistent with that agenda. If I could be so bold, in many respects, it is well ahead of the rest of the states and territories.

This reform is, of course, not finished and the remaining stages of tax reform will matter greatly. We will continue to reduce stamp duty and we will continue to shift the balance of taxation away from transactions toward ownership. We will continue to reform the system. We will prioritise owner-occupiers over investors, ensuring the benefits of

reform are directed towards those who live in the homes they purchase, not those who treat housing solely as a financial asset. That is an important distinction. It goes to fairness, it goes to accessibility and it goes to the kind of housing system that we want to build.

There are always easier paths in public policy. I know this personally over 15 years. We could have deferred all of these decisions. We could have relied on short-term measures. We could have ignored all of the expert advice that called repeatedly for structural reform. Why not? Every other state and territory in this country has done basically nothing on this, but we did not. We chose a harder, long-term reform path that required consistency across decades of budgets—a path that delivers gradually, yes, but durably. And today we see those benefits taking shape. First home buyers face lower barriers, a housing market with greater mobility, a growing pipeline of more diverse and affordable housing, and a tax system that is more stable, more efficient and more equitable than the one it is replacing.

This reform is not just about taxes; it is about opportunity. It is about ensuring that the next generation of Canberrans can afford to live in the city they call home. It is about building a housing system that works, not just for today but also for the decades that come. And it is about having the courage to act on the advice that has been before every Australian government for years. In the ACT, back to 2012, we have acted. We are delivering and we will continue to see this reform through to completion, with a relentless focus on housing supply, on first home buyers and on the long-term interests of this community.

I present the following paper:

Tax reform and housing affordability—Ministerial statement, 10 June 2026.

I move:

That the Assembly take note of the paper.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

## **Teachers and school staff—enterprise bargaining 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) (10.43): Today I rise to update the Assembly on enterprise bargaining for school based staff. ACT public school staff are covered by a number of enterprise agreements, primarily the teaching staff EA, the admin EA, and the infrastructure EA. The Education Directorate received the final claims for the teaching staff EA and the Education-Directorate-specific schedule of the admin EA in December 2025 and in February 2026, and, since that time, significant effort has gone into working through those claims carefully.

The claims on the table in enterprise bargaining are broad, and that is not surprising. They touch on pay but also workload, class sizes, support for students and how

resources are distributed across schools. These negotiations matter. They shape the day-to-day experience and lives of the people who deliver public education across the ACT. This includes our teachers standing in classrooms every day, our principals leading their school communities, and our school support staff ensuring everything runs as it should so that all students can learn and thrive.

The directorate is continuing to bargain in good faith to reach positive outcomes for our important workforce. Senior staff from the directorate are meeting with union representatives at least weekly. I am also meeting with the AEU weekly and often more times. I can report that negotiations have been making progress in recent weeks. The most recent meetings with the AEU occurred on Wednesday and Friday last week. The directorate met with the CPSU on 29 May and 3 June and has bargaining meetings planned with the UWU for Thursday this week.

The Assembly has asked for an update on the school assistant classification review. The review was a commitment in the previous enterprise agreement. I acknowledge that this work did not progress as it should have, and I am sorry for that. The government has recommitted to doing the classification review, as well as doing a work value assessment, with a view to implementing the outcomes of those reviews in the next agreement.

School assistants are a critical part of the public school ecosystem and provide important supports in schools. Like teachers, school assistants are a majority-women part of our workforce and their work has changed significantly in recent years. We have asked more of our school assistants and their work is much more complex. That is why doing a work value assessment as well as a classification review was such an important claim from the unions. I acknowledge that there will be some who want that work to be done more quickly, but it is complex work that needs to be done right.

The ACT government has a longstanding and constructive working relationship with unions representing workers in schools. They are important partners in the provision of public education in the ACT. I respect the role that they play and the work that they do in representing their members, and I respect the rights of their members to organise, to work collectively and to ultimately take industrial action. Members will be aware of the industrial action that is planned for tomorrow. As I have said before, nobody wants to get to the point where they need to take industrial action. I know the impact this has had on school communities, including school leaders, staff, students and their families.

To all of the union members in our schools: I know you are frustrated and I know that you are determined. Thank you for being members of your union. It is the best way to have your say about the future of your workplace. To students and families: thank you for your patience. I also thank everyone who has written to me—students, staff and families—to share their experiences and concerns. I am committed to getting a positive outcome that reflects our shared goals for a better workplace and, ultimately, a stronger public education system.

I present the following paper:

Enterprise bargaining—Ministerial statement, Tuesday, 9 June 2026.

I move:

That the Assembly take note of the paper.

**MISS NUTTALL**(Brindabella) (10.47): I thank the Minister for Education and Early Childhood for her statement this morning which has come in response to Ms Lee's motion and my amendment on education bargaining that we passed in the Assembly during the last sitting week. My amendment called on the Minister for Education and Early Childhood, in collaboration with the Minister for the Public Service, to publicly respond to the outcomes of the School Assistant Classification Standards Framework review and acknowledge that ACT school based employees should receive nationally competitive salaries and working conditions.

The public response we have just heard from the minister is that the work to respond to and implement outcomes of the School Assistant Classification Standards Framework review "did not progress as it should have". While I appreciate the minister's acknowledgement of this failure and genuine apology, I frankly do not think this is good enough. I believe that the school assistants, the teachers and all of the public school workers who are planning to strike tomorrow would likely agree with me, let alone parents who have to take time off work due to the strike, and their kids, who are missing out on learning for a whole day.

The minister admitted that the review of the School Assistant Classification Standards Framework was a commitment the government made under the previous enterprise agreement. I think this is telling of how this ACT Labor government have been running two stories about their engagement in enterprise bargaining, and, more pointedly, they have been running two stories about their commitment to making our public education system thrive in the ACT. Seriously, how can the government continue to say they are engaging with the union to discuss their claims when they have not done the necessary work to understand the basis of the claims?

The wording of the AEU claim concerning the School Assistant Classification Standards Framework review includes the following:

School assistant work is frontline work. It is dynamic and unpredictable. School assistants should have pay scales that reflect the unique nature of their work rather than being tied to the Administrative Service Officer (ASO) classification.

Additionally, the claim seeks for the government to "implement the outcomes of the review of the School Assistant Classification Standards Framework, which must provide role clarity and definition for school assistants."

The public school resourcing review told us what LSAs and teachers have been telling us for so long: classroom needs are increasingly complex, current funding for students with a disability is woefully inadequate, and learning support assistants are carrying a lot of this. How can the government express care for teachers and school assistants as an important workforce when the designated piece of work set to determine how school assistants should be covered under the EA, how they should be valued in real terms, has not even been done? It is a slap in the face for the people whose livelihoods and working conditions are determined by these negotiations, and it is a slap in the face for the AEU,

who have been tirelessly wrangling the government to come to the table and listen to them.

It is a common theme with this government that, until their hand is forced to finally admit something is inadequate—that it “did not progress as it should have”—they will maintain that absolutely everything is being done to resolve things. It is clear as day that today the government’s hand has been forced. It is not enough to express commitment and respect for teachers and learning support assistants’ right to strike; the minister must do the work that they have committed to.

The ACT Greens will continue to stand up for all public school staff and for students of the ACT. They will stand alongside them tomorrow as they strike for proper working conditions, as they darn well should.

**MS LEE** (Kurrajong) (10.51): I rise to take note of the minister’s paper. This is again a case of too little too late, and, of course, actions speak louder than words, as we know. This is a saga that the minister has been presiding over for not just the period of these enterprise bargaining negotiations but also her entire tenure as the education minister. This is the minister who has stood in this very chamber and stated, time and time again, that the path that she was on and the path that her directorate was on was the right one for our students, our teachers and our families. She has proven to be so wrong.

This has been a betrayal. It is nothing short of a betrayal of the community that entrusted this minister and her directorate with their children’s education and entrusted this minister and her directorate with the wellbeing of our teachers on the front line and our school assistants on the front line. This is a minister who has utterly failed so many in our community. To come into this place after so much pressure—not just in the last sitting period but also over the course of the last 11 months of the enterprise bargaining negotiations that have gone nowhere—with a ministerial statement that is, frankly, insulting is again too little too late.

As Miss Nuttall pointed out, the minister cannot come into this place once again and say that she respects the union and that she has been negotiating with them in good faith when, after 11 months, the union still has no genuine reason to have any confidence in the minister and the government. As the president of AEU ACT pointed out, no-one wants to see school closures. It has an enormous impact on our students’ learning and staff wellbeing, and, of course, it causes enormous disruption to families. The fact that we are seeing the teachers union take this extraordinary action for the first time in 15 years demonstrates how far they have been pushed to the brink by this minister’s lack of action.

The independent ACT public schools resourcing review laid bare the problems that this minister has been papering over for years. Students, parents, experts, the Canberra Liberals—including you, Mr Speaker, while you held the shadow portfolio—pointed out, black and white, worthy issues. There was point-blank denial at best and utter dismissal of all of the genuine concerns that have been raised over the years, and now the minister comes into this place and says, “Hey, we’re continuing to talk.” Well, Minister, talk is cheap. Unless there is genuine action, there is no reason for teachers, school assistants, school communities, students, parents and families to believe anything that comes out of this minister’s mouth or is written on the paper that she

stands here with.

The fact is that we had a motion in the last sitting period and we had agreement from everybody. Despite the words of bravado from Labor backbenchers, we had agreement. It was voted on by everybody. For the minister to come to this place with that statement really goes to show how out of depth she is—an utter failure to a generation of Canberra students. She should really hang her head in shame.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

## **Health care—data on access to specialists—update Ministerial statement**

**MS STEPHEN-SMITH** (Kurrajong—Minister for Health, Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Finance and Minister for the Public Service) (10.56): I rise today to provide the Assembly with the outcomes of the inquiry into ACT health system data, demand and processes. As members will recall, on 24 June 2025 the Assembly passed a motion which called on the ACT government to “establish an independent inquiry into identifying relevant health data and processes that would allow Canberrans, clinicians and policymakers to be best informed about the functionality of the health system”.

The motion also required that the inquiry be established within three months and led by a suitably qualified chair with no current or recent past employment or contractual relationship with ACT public hospitals and who has an understanding of the particular characteristics of a health system like the ACT, including the role of the Canberra Hospital as a teaching hospital. Following the motion, the Health and Community Services Directorate rapidly established the inquiry, which commenced on 25 August 2025. Mr Michael Walsh PSM was appointed as the independent chair following a national search. Mr Walsh has more than 30 years experience across multiple state and national health systems, including as former Director-General of Queensland Health and inaugural CEO of eHealth New South Wales, positioning him to provide authoritative, independent advice. To further strengthen independence and capability, consultancy support was engaged in October 2025 through a market process, which contributed technical expertise, research and analysis and support for consultations, submissions and report development.

As required by the resolution and terms of reference, Mr Walsh undertook extensive consultation across a broad range of key stakeholders and executives, staff and clinicians, national health bodies, peak organisations, community and industrial partners, non-government organisations and with some members of the Legislative Assembly. This work included 115 consultations facilitated with 259 participants across the ACT health system, including clinicians and staff, consumers, key partners and industrial representatives. These were carried out both in person and virtually, through focus group discussions and in-depth interviews. Insights gained through the stakeholder consultations were supplemented by 29 written submissions received by the inquiry. In addition, a comprehensive desktop review was undertaken of qualitative and quantitative data, including publicly available information, public health data and reports, as well as documents provided by the Health and Community Services Directorate and Canberra Health Services. The desktop review also compared national and international health system practices applicable to the inquiry.

The final report provides useful context on the substantial changes and challenges faced by the ACT health system over the past eight years. Alongside the significant disruption caused by the COVID-19 pandemic from 2020 to 2023, key reforms over the period include the 2018 creation of two health entities—the ACT Health Directorate and CHS; the 2022 implementation of the Digital Health Record to enhance patient care and information sharing; the 2023 acquisition of Calvary Public Hospital Bruce, now the North Canberra Hospital or NCH, integrating it into CHS; and the 2025 machinery of government changes, bringing together the ACT Health Directorate with the Community Services Directorate to form the Health and Community Services Directorate and creating Digital Canberra. Additionally, over the last 15 years, the health system has been subject to numerous reviews and inquiries addressing issues such as data integrity, workplace culture, financial sustainability, service delivery and governance.

The final report of the inquiry recognises the complexities of health system governance in Australia, with the requirement to meet both local jurisdictional legislative and policy requirements and commitments under the National Health Reform Agreement. For small jurisdictions, such as the ACT, this complexity presents additional challenges arising from the lack of economies of scale. The report further recognises that the ACT government has designed an ACT health system that meets the requirements of the NHRA but also leverages whole-of-ACT government expertise in areas such as digital and infrastructure capability.

I would like to specifically highlight the inquiry’s acknowledgement and recognition of the dedication of staff across the ACT public health system in delivering exceptional patient outcomes and their commitment to driving improvements that build a stronger, better equipped and more collaborative health system. Alongside these strengths, the inquiry has identified opportunities to build upon this existing capability to ensure that the health system is positioned for long-term success and sustainability in an increasing complex and demanding health landscape.

The findings and recommendations in the final report have been made across key themes which were formed based on consultations and submissions and have been mapped against the terms of reference. Across the seven themes, there are 45 recommendations, with a further four related to implementation. The findings of the inquiry have identified genuine strengths and meaningful accomplishments of the ACT health system, despite the period of significant change. The consultations have highlighted that clear system governance is a critical foundation that influences or impacts on many other issues across all themes, with stakeholders seeking greater clarity in roles and responsibilities across the directorate, CHS and Digital Canberra.

Stakeholders emphasised that ambiguity in roles could contribute to inefficiencies, delays in decision-making and challenges in performing duties effectively. While improved clarity is expected to strengthen workforce culture and support more efficient, effective operations. There are three recommendations made to clarify ACT health system governance. Consultations emphasised that delivering high-quality, safe, evidence-based care is central to a well-performing health system while identifying opportunities to strengthen system-wide governance for clinical quality and safety. Stakeholders noted that improved governance, supported by better use of clinical data

and appropriate legislation, would enhance policies, practices and organisational culture and that these issues are closely linked to broader challenges such as workforce culture and system and data governance. There are five recommendations in the report aimed at improving clinical quality and safety.

In relation to service planning, demand and sustainability, stakeholders highlighted that Canberra's growing population is placing increasing pressure on the public health system, emphasising the need for clear planning around the new north-side hospital and how services across Canberra Hospital and NCH will meet changing demand. They also highlighted the importance of maintaining strong cross-border collaboration with New South Wales, improving demand flow between hospitals and increasing efficiency through better use of outpatient services, referral pathways and alternatives to emergency care. Stakeholders had mixed views on reliance on New South Wales tertiary services, balancing sustainability with local access and stressed the importance of safe service delivery. Concerns were also noted around surgical wait times and communication with patients as well as the need for clearer, more collaborative implementation of planned care reforms to better support clinical practice, quality and safety and ensure long-term system sustainability. There are nine recommendations to improve service planning, demand and sustainability.

Stakeholders identified planned care reforms as an important area of focus, noting progress in standardising referrals and criteria, but calling for clearer communication of the purpose, principles and decision-making underpinning the program. They emphasised the need for stronger clinical engagement in design and implementation, particularly in managing elective surgery waitlists, alongside greater transparency and consistency in referral and triage processes. Improved collaboration between clinicians and management was seen as key to enhancing efficiency, continuity of care and confidence in the reforms, while embedding clinical judgement in operational decisions would support more timely, patient-centred and reliable care. The inquiry has made 14 recommendations to assist in progressing planned care reforms.

The inquiry final report outlines that stakeholders raised workforce and culture as key challenges, highlighting recruitment, retention and morale as ongoing issues despite recent improvement efforts. Strengthening leadership, training and research capabilities have been identified as opportunities as well as implementing more consistent, standardised and automated shared services across the directorate and CHS. Existing initiatives and reviews highlight the importance of a coordinated, system-wide approach to driving sustained cultural and workforce improvements. There are six recommendations aimed at improving workforce and culture.

Reliable data collection and reporting were identified as critical to understanding system performance, planning services and improving patient outcomes. While improvements have followed the introduction of the Digital Health Record, stakeholders highlighted ongoing issues with data quality, consistency and accessibility as well as the need for clearer governance arrangements, including defined roles, streamlined processes and a supportive legislative framework to ensure secure and effective data use. Stakeholders emphasised the importance of a coordinated, system-wide data governance framework aligned across the directorate, CHS and Digital Canberra, alongside better data sharing, improved public reporting and stronger patient-focused information. Challenges with DHR design and inconsistent data entry were

identified as impacting data reliability and clinical use, reinforcing the need for clinically led models, standardisation and investment in data quality to support transparency, decision-making and overall system performance. There are six recommendations on data collection and reporting.

Stakeholders also consistently emphasised that the Digital Health Record is a critical enabler of safe, high-quality clinical care across the ACT, delivering clear improvements in access to patient information, communication and coordination compared to previous systems. Clinicians have highlighted faster visibility of patient histories, results and documentation, alongside strengthened safety processes and more integrated care through tools such as electronic referrals, patient portals and growing connectivity with primary care and My Health Record. At the same time, stakeholders were clear that further work is needed to realise the full benefits of the DHR. This includes improving data quality and consistency, strengthening governance and clarity of roles across the system and ensuring workflows are standardised and led by clinical expertise. Embedding clinicians more deeply in system design and decision-making, alongside stronger privacy and legislative frameworks, will be essential to building confidence, improving usability and ensuring the DHR continues to support better outcomes for patients and the health system overall. There are two recommendations relating to the DHR.

There is also one recommendation each related to cardiology and orthopaedics. Essentially, the same recommendation has been made for both specialty areas: that CHS should continue to work with the teams to further progress how services are networked across locations, with the aim of improving the quality, equity and timeliness of services. The four recommendations on implementation are to develop a comprehensive implementation plan; allocate responsibility to an oversight group to undertake regular monitoring of the progress of implementation; undertake an 18-month implementation progress review with a public report to be completed by 30 June 2028; and undertake a three-year implementation progress review with a public report to be completed by 31 December 2029.

This inquiry had a very broad and complex remit and it has been a significant program of work achieved in less than 12 months. I am confident Mr Walsh has led the inquiry with integrity and that the recommendations he has made are considered and practical and will support the ongoing improvement of the ACT's health system and delivery of services over the long term. At this stage, the government has accepted the final report and will consider the recommendations in detail before providing a response by the end of 2026, as required in the original motion.

Importantly, however, we are not waiting for that process to be completed before taking action. A lot of work is already underway across the directorate, CHS and Digital Canberra towards improving our health system. Much of the current work program aligns with the direction of the inquiry recommendations, putting us in a good position to both deliver the improvements and develop a formal government response. Consultations have highlighted that clear health system governance is a critical foundation influencing many issues across all reform themes. In response, we have prioritised work to strengthen the health system governance framework, establishing clearer governance and accountabilities across the system, reflecting the three recommendations focused on this area. We have also commenced improvements to data

governance, recognising the central role in enabling effective oversight, accountability and system performance.

There is also ongoing collaboration between New South Wales and the ACT to strengthen cross-border health service delivery. Both jurisdictions are working together to ensure people living in border communities receive integrated, patient-centred care, regardless of where they live or access services. This work is supported by clear cross-border arrangements, shared data and strong clinical governance. The inquiry identified that almost 27 per cent of admitted patients are non-ACT residents, and we must continue to work with New South Wales to ensure people are receiving care closer to home where possible. Negotiations on a new cross-border agreement with New South Wales are progressing this month, and these will also reflect the new National Health Reform Agreement addendum.

Work already underway across CHS also includes the refresh of the planned care project. The inquiry found the principles of planned care are right but that they had been implemented without sufficient collaboration and consultation. A new governance framework for planned care has already begun to be implemented and the chief operating officer is driving collaboration in this program moving forward. Similarly, the Operations Centre is being reviewed with a view to collaborating and consulting with stakeholders, in line with the recommendations of the inquiry. In saying this, it is important to recognise that the planned care project has been successful in bringing down long waitlists in elective surgery and has seen higher levels of surgical activities undertaken, while the Operations Centre has made a significant difference to patient flow in Canberra Hospital.

In July 2025, the Local Hospital Network Assurance Committee was established in response to the government's budget commitment to health system transformation. This is a three-year program of work aimed at improving the efficiency and performance of our public hospital system while ensuring it remains sustainable into the future. The assurance committee is actively progressing measures to support health system sustainability that align closely with the inquiry's recommendations. Encouragingly, this work is already delivering early benefits. We are seeing a system that is meeting demand across emergency departments and acute care services, reflecting a more responsive and better-coordinated approach to care delivery. In addition, the directorate has undertaken a detailed analysis of cost variation, particularly the difference between the ACT's cost per Weighted Activity Unit and the national average. This work highlights the structural cost pressures faced by smaller jurisdictions. This has also been recognised by the commonwealth, with a recent investment of \$75 million in 2026-27 through the small state funding measure. Together, these reforms and investments position the ACT to deliver a more efficient, sustainable and high-performing health system for our community.

Projections indicate that demand for hospital services will continue to rise over the coming years, with expected growth across several key areas. The directorate is working to incorporate recent system performance and emerging trends to ensure that updated projections and modelling reflect current realities, such as increased demand following the pandemic period and ongoing workforce and capacity constraints. The directorate's planning work will consider changes to the ACT population that will impact health services delivery and also look at the future of healthcare delivery outside

of the hospital through community-based services, virtual care and expanded hospital-in-the-home models to reduce avoidable presentations and admissions and enable earlier safe discharge. CHS is also progressing work to commission reviews of both outpatient services and the walk-in centres and has commenced reviews of CHS, allied health and administration workforces, which are due to be completed this year.

Delivering high-quality, safe, evidence-based care is fundamental to a well-performing health system and is closely linked to workforce culture and the broader system governance. Over the next six months, CHS and the directorate will commence priority actions aligned with the five recommendations aimed at strengthening clinical quality and safety. The Australian Commission on Safety and Quality in Health Care has recently released an updated National Model for Clinical Governance, replacing the 2017 version. This serves as a resource for hospital boards and executives to help ensure the delivery of high-quality care to patients in both public and private settings. It can be used by health services to assess their existing clinical governance arrangements, identify gaps, develop implementation plans and track the ongoing delivery of safe, high-quality care—aligning well with the work to address the recommendations. Digital Canberra is also continuing its work with the directorate and CHS to embed clinical leadership and standardised workflows to support DHR optimisations.

The formal government response and a detailed implementation plan will be developed over the coming months and will be tabled in the Assembly by the last sitting day of 2026. It is important to acknowledge at the outset that the implementation of these recommendations will take some time, with work to be phased over the next few years, particularly the elements that involve significant stakeholder engagement, policy and planning work that will, in some instances, also result in changes to legislation.

In his correspondence to me in providing the final report, Mr Walsh emphasised that the success of these changes will rely on open engagement with clinicians, other staff, health consumers and external stakeholders; strong collaboration between the directorate, CHS, Digital Canberra and Infrastructure Canberra; and clarity and transparency in the way our health system is organised, governed and changed. I could not agree more.

I would like to extend my sincere thanks to Mr Walsh and to the independent team for their efforts in undertaking this important piece of work for the territory. Mr Walsh is well respected in the health sector, and we have received positive feedback about the way in which he and the independent team have conducted the inquiry and engaged with stakeholders. I would also like to thank all those who participated in the inquiry for their invaluable contributions and input throughout.

The final report of the inquiry represents a vital opportunity to listen, to learn and to act—ensuring our health system is equipped to meet the needs of our community now and into the future. I commend the final report to the Assembly and note that the report will be made publicly available on the ACT government website shortly.

I present the following papers:

Health data and processes—Independent inquiry—Assembly resolution of 24 June 2025—Government response—

Inquiry into ACT health system data, demand and processes—Final Inquiry  
Report, dated 8 May 2026.

Ministerial statement, 10 June 2026.

I move:

That the Assembly take note of the ministerial statement.

**MR PARTON** (Brindabella—Leader of the Opposition) (11.16): I would like to respond briefly to the ministerial statement on the independent inquiry into the ACT health system data, demand and processes. I think the first point that must be made is that this inquiry did not arise because the government voluntarily sought external scrutiny of the health system. This inquiry was established because concerns were repeatedly raised by clinicians, patients, staff and the opposition about the reliability of health data, the transparency of reporting and whether decision-makers were receiving an accurate picture of what was happening across our health system. The inquiry itself was the product of an Assembly resolution, because confidence had been eroded.

While we have not yet had the opportunity to review the final report in detail, the minister's statement provides some important insights into its findings. What stands out is that many of the issues identified are not new at all. The minister has told the Assembly that stakeholders raised concerns about governance arrangements, unclear roles and responsibilities, workforce culture, recruitment, retention, data quality, planned care reforms, clinical engagement, referral pathways, service planning and demand management. They are not emerging issues. These are the issues that clinicians, unions, patients and the opposition have been raising for years. In many respects, the minister's statement reads less like the discovery of new problems and more like confirmation of long-standing concerns.

The statement acknowledges that stakeholders identified ambiguity in governance, inefficiencies in decision-making and challenges in performing duties effectively. It acknowledges concerns about workforce culture and morale. It acknowledges problems with data quality, consistency and accessibility. It acknowledges that planned care reforms were implemented without sufficient collaboration and consultation. I think these are significant findings. If stakeholders are telling the inquiry that governance is unclear, data cannot always be relied on, clinicians have not been adequately consulted and workforce morale remains a challenge, I think questions must be asked about why these issues were allowed to persist for so long.

One of the most striking elements of the minister's statement is the repeated assertion that the work is already underway. We are told that governance reforms are underway; data governance reforms are underway; planned care reforms are being refreshed; operational reviews are underway; workforce reviews are underway; and clinical governance improvements are underway. If all of these reforms are already occurring, I think Canberrans are entitled to ask a very simple question, and that is: why did it take an independent inquiry to identify the need for them?

The government cannot simultaneously celebrate the inquiry while claiming that it was already doing everything that the inquiry appears to recommend, because both propositions cannot be true. The reality is that this inquiry has highlighted issues that

should have been addressed years ago. The minister has also highlighted the need for clearer planning around the future north-side hospital and the growing demand being placed on our health system—something that I will seek to address later today with a motion.

As Canberra's population grows and demand increases, transparency becomes more important, not less. Canberrans deserve confidence that decisions about infrastructure, service planning, elective surgery, outpatient services and workforce capability are being made on the basis of accurate and reliable information. They deserve confidence that lessons from this inquiry will be acted upon. The minister says the inquiry found the principles of planned care were right but the implementation was wrong. That distinction matters little to the patient who has spent years waiting for treatment. Good policy, badly implemented, still produces bad outcomes.

The opposition will carefully examine the final report once it becomes available. We will assess the recommendations on their merit and we will hold the government accountable for implementation. The true measure of this inquiry will not be the number of recommendations that it contains; it will be whether patients experience shorter waits, whether clinicians feel heard and respected, whether the data can be trusted, whether governance is improved and whether Canberrans ultimately receive better health care. The inquiry was established because confidence in aspects of the health system had been called into question. Restoring that confidence requires more than another report; it requires transparency, accountability and a willingness by the government to acknowledge where it has fallen short and to act decisively to fix it. That is the standard that Canberrans should expect and it is the standard against which this government will continue to be judged.

**MS VASSAROTTI**(Kurrajong) (11.21): I rise to briefly speak after the minister's statement. We are really looking forward to the tabling of the report, where we will see the detail and look at the recommendations and the pathway forward. I would like to note my thanks to Mr Walsh, who has undertaken the independent inquiry. It was really reassuring to hear in the minister's statement the comprehensive consultation and engagement process that occurred throughout this process. This will need to continue to be a real priority as we move into the implementation phase. Key issues for the ACT Greens are the excessive elective surgery waiting lists and the lack of access to wait time data for specialist procedures and importance for our procedures and appointments. We are frequently contacted by people who have been waiting months, if not years, to get in to see a specialist in the ACT.

On budget day, and in the context of recent discussion about the New South Wales reliance on the taxpayer-funded services of the ACT taxpayers, it is good to see government engaging in conversations about the fact that 27 per cent of admitted patients are from New South Wales. We also know that a lot of the Canberrans have to go to Sydney because they cannot get in to see someone else here. As such, it is important to investigate how many ACT residents have to leave the territory for specific health services in New South Wales and undertake the work to ensure that we provide a scope of health services in the territory that does not put the burden of a three-hour journey onto patients who need care.

We know that, because of these wait times, many people are forced into the private

system if they can afford it. Currently, the government does not publish data about the time between referral and the initial appointments. Seeing people waiting for years—waiting four or five years—is unfortunately not uncommon. But, once we have firm data, we will be able to understand how bad the problem really is and how we need to work to fix it.

We know that preventative health is the best way to invest in health care and getting people the help they need before they end in crisis. We look forward to reading the tabled report and understanding the implementation and seeing better outcomes for people in the ACT, particularly those that need health care—and need it now, not in two, three, four or five years.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

### **Minimum age of criminal responsibility—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) (11.24): I rise today to acknowledge that 1 July marks one year since the ACT became the first, and still the only, jurisdiction in Australia to raise the minimum age of criminal responsibility to 14. It was a bold, principled step. It was also the right one. We did not wait for others to lead; we acted because children and young people deserve protection, not punishment. We acted because the evidence was clear that criminalising children and young people does not make communities safer. We acted because the evidence demonstrates that children and young people engaging in harmful behaviour have unmet therapeutic needs and that supporting them to meet those needs is the most effective way to prevent further harm and ensure a healthier and safer community for everyone.

This anniversary is an important milestone. It is a time to acknowledge the legislative change and service system reforms undertaken by government and to recognise the immense work undertaken by frontline services, Aboriginal community-controlled organisations and community organisations to make this reform real. These are the organisations working day and night to ensure that the right services are in place to meet the needs of children, young people, their families, kin and community when and where they need it.

Raising the age was never just a legislative change; it was a commitment to doing better for children, young people and their families. That commitment requires hard, detailed, collaborative work—the kind of work that rarely makes headlines but makes lasting change possible. At its core, the MACR reform is simple: children and young people should receive support, not a criminal record. That means understanding and responding to what drives harmful behaviour. These are things like undiagnosed, unrecognised, untreated and unsupported trauma, disability, mental ill health, school disengagement, disconnection from family, kin and culture and unsafe home lives. It means bringing the system to the child, rather than forcing the child to fit the system—because how can anyone break a cycle while still trapped inside it?

Translating that principle into reality has required extraordinary commitment. I thank

every worker, every service, every minister, every agency and every community partner who made this first year possible. This reform exists on paper because of legislation, but it exists in practice because of people. I am deeply proud of this reform and equally proud of the Canberrans who stand behind it. Above all, I am proud of the children, young people, families and kin who have chosen to engage voluntarily with services like the Safer Youth Response Service and the Therapeutic Support Panel for Children and Young People. Families who, for the first time, are finding a system built for them rather than against them and families whose willingness to engage today reflect a system that is beginning to meet them where they are. This approach is not “soft”; it is effective and evidence based. When we respond to the drivers of harm, we prevent harm. When children and young people stabilise, learn, reconnect and heal, they become safer and so do their communities.

Over the past year, two new services have been central to putting this reform into practice. The Safer Youth Response Service is a frontline service that provides immediate support when children and young people come to police attention. The Safer Youth Response Service works closely with ACT Policing and Children Youth and Families to share information quickly, make rapid referrals and ensure children, young people, families and kin receive the right support straightaway, day or night, weekdays or weekends. The Therapeutic Support Panel for Children and Young People is a specialised, multidisciplinary panel that assesses the needs of children and young people referred under the new therapeutic framework. Through the panel, children and young people receive therapeutic, culturally safe, trauma-informed support that addresses the drivers of harm, not merely the symptoms.

Together, these services are already reshaping the system. They enable earlier support through better, more coordinated pathways. They build trust with families and kin who have every reason to mistrust institutions. They demonstrate what happens when services collaborate instead of operating in silos.

Last year, I tabled the Therapeutic Support Panel’s 2025 report in this Assembly. I would like to thank the chair and panel members for their careful and deeply thoughtful work. Across the 2024 and 2025 reports, the story is clear: these are children and young people with complex, overlapping needs. A significant number are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. For the first time, children and young people aged 13 and younger are receiving support without entering the youth justice system. Nearly all the panel’s clients are engaging actively and positively through trusting relationships with caseworkers and service providers. There are notable improvements in emotional regulation, behaviour, living arrangements and connection to culture, school and community.

Recent data shared by ACT Policing shows that, in the first six months after the reform, there was no significant increase in police interactions with children and young people under 14. At the same time, Safer Youth data shows that just over half of children and young people 13 and younger referred to the service by ACT Policing have not required a further referral, demonstrating the effectiveness of early and timely crisis support. This is the reform working as intended.

However, progress cannot be measured honestly without acknowledging who our systems have failed the most and where it is imperative that our efforts remain focused:

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, young people and their families and kin. The ACT Aboriginal Children's Forum, established last year, provides an essential space for Aboriginal-led decision-making. It is informing policy, shaping practice and setting priorities. This is self-determination in action. Programs like Yurwan Ghuda further demonstrate what culturally grounded support can look like in practice. By connecting nine- to 12-year-old Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children with culture and community, they are building their identity, wellbeing and resilience, leading them to better experiences at school and away from the youth justice system pipeline.

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elected Body has supported the intent of this reform and has provided practical guidance to shape its direction. Meeting our commitments to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elected Body and the National Agreement on Closing the Gap means ensuring there is proportionate resourcing for Aboriginal community-controlled organisations, support for stronger cultural governance and improved cultural safety and coordination of responses designed with communities. These are the foundations required to address the profound over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people in our youth justice and child protection systems.

The panel's reports are clear about where the system must continue to change and where this government must act. We are looking into reforming education so that systems adapt to children and young people, not the other way around. A formal review is underway to deliver flexible, responsive pathways; we are progressing work on strengthening system-wide responses to harmful sexualised behaviours by exploring what system responses are best to help these families heal; we are continuing to invest in culturally grounded responses, embedding cultural authority at the centre of decision-making and service delivery; we are taking steps to improve diagnostic and disability support pathways, with Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder now a clear system priority; and we are lifting standards and improving processes for intensive therapy orders and intensive therapy places to ensure they are safe, therapeutic and trauma-informed, not just in principle but in practice.

For children and young people with the most complex needs, responsibility rests with the system, not with the child. For a small group of children and young people with the most significant and complex needs, the system must continue to develop high-support, specialist responses. Work to strengthen intensive therapy orders is continuing, with clearer clinical leadership and closer collaboration across services. Children Youth and Families has established the Clinical Services Board, alongside decision-making and oversight by the Chief Practitioner. This sits with improved workforce training by Canberra Health Services and a joint Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service and Alcohol and Drug Service pilot delivered through the Adolescent Mobile Outreach Service. Together, these efforts are supporting more coordinated, outreach-based care. These service improvements are helping children and young people engage more effectively, avoid institutionalism and are responding to the issues identified in the 2024 and 2025 panel reports. As the system architecture continues to mature, strengthening these therapeutic pathways will remain a priority.

Accountability is central to the success of this reform. That is why a further progress report will be provided later this year. That report will clearly set out the actions taken

by ACT government agencies and ACT Policing in response to the 2024 and 2025 Therapeutic Support Panel reports and other emerging issues under the MACR reform. This is about transparency, shared responsibility and ensuring that the evidence provided to government translates into real, measurable system change.

This reform goes beyond youth justice. It extends beyond children, young people, families and kin. It is whole-of-government, whole-of-community and whole-of-society reform. Children and young people's rights cannot be protected by one part of government alone. Every minister, every ACT government agency and every community service carries responsibility for upholding those rights. This reform, therefore, reaches multiple systems—child protection, health, mental health, disability, education, housing, policing and the community sector.

ACT Policing plays a crucial role within this shared effort, maintaining a strong partnership focus and sharing learnings with other jurisdictions across Australia and New Zealand. We have also now established a Data and Evaluation Working Group to improve the quality and use of shared information. It is still early. Long-term trends will take time to emerge. What we do have is the groundwork laid for a strong evaluation framework—one that will hold us accountable, inform decisions and demonstrate to the Canberra community and the rest of Australia how this reform is progressing.

Our focus for the coming year is clear: we will continue building a system that comes to children and young people, rather than continuing to see them, their families and kin navigate structures never designed for them. There will always be a need for statutory responses and crisis supports; however, if we get this reform right, there will be less need for them. We are already seeing signs of that future.

Raising the age was the right decision. The real work, the real change, is only just beginning. Children and young people today and children and young people yet to come deserve nothing less than our best. They deserve a system that protects them, supports them, keeps them out of jail and helps them thrive. I cannot overstate the profound effect that appropriate, early supports can have on individuals, families and communities. By investing in children and young people's futures rather than reacting harshly to their pasts, we are building a safer, stronger, more connected Canberra.

I present the following paper:

First Anniversary of Minimum Age of Criminal Responsibility—Ministerial statement, 10 June 2026.

I move:

That the Assembly take note of the paper.

**MR PARTON** (Brindabella—Leader of the Opposition) (11.37): I felt compelled to rise and respond to this ministerial statement from Mr Pettersson this morning because it just needs to be responded to. If the minister is genuinely of the belief that this reform is working, I would suggest he needs to get out more. Nobody can doubt—no one in

this chamber would doubt—the intent of a legislation to raise the age of criminal responsibility. Nobody could argue with a push to get children out of the criminal justice system. It should be the aim of all parties and all players in this space.

But it seems clear that the diversionary pathways that are in place are not fulfilling the promises that the government laid out at the start of this process, and that the unintended consequences of this change are there for everybody to see—except the minister.

I respond to this statement today, not to make a statement about a policy position from the Canberra Liberals, but to represent the many hundreds of constituents who have contacted me either by email, social media or face-to-face. I speak on behalf of those people, because they have formed a view that there has been a marked increase in visible crime from this younger cohort. They would challenge the minister's assertion that police interactions with children under the age of 14 have decreased.

I spoke to the Australian Federal Police Association this morning, who rubbished the claim that the statistics involving police interactions with under-14s have not changed. They said to me that those interactions now had very little point, and that they simply would not be being recorded.

I was recently contacted by a liquor store owner. I will not say which one. He told me that the majority of his theft problem is caused by 13-year-old girls. I could not quite believe it. He showed me some of the videos from the store; it would blow your mind. The MO of these girls is to video everything and, if they are approached by staff, to call out “paedophile” with the threat that, “We will post this and you will go down in flames online”. And if, indeed, the staff managed to usher the girls outside of the store without stealing anything, they would just throw rocks at the window and try and kick the glass in. The girls were extremely understanding of the significance that being under the age of 14 lent to them, in terms of a suit of armour.

I recently attended a youth crime forum in Tuggeranong—it was not put on by the evil conservatives; it was put on by the shoppers' union. The forum was exceptionally well attended by staff and management of retail businesses. Retail workers told us that they were being threatened by groups of teenagers every day. Every day. They said that they had resorted to just letting young people steal things because it was the safest way to deal with this “epidemic of crime”—their words, not mine. Staff talked about feeling anxiety, fear and fatigue. One respondent suggested that the ongoing incidents left them unsafe and “unable to protect my team any longer”.

We heard from an area manager for a franchise, who oversees 11 stores. Now, you want to get your head around this. This area manager oversees 11 stores: four of them in the ACT, seven in New South Wales. He indicated that the level of theft was far greater in the ACT stores than in New South Wales, even though some of his New South Wales outlets were in lower socio-economic areas. The suggestion was that, on many weeks, two of the ACT stores are losing more stock in theft than they are actually selling.

Now, I understand that this position is not created entirely by offenders under the age of 14. But I spoke to people after the forum who told me that, “These kids are smart. They fully understand that, technically, they cannot commit a crime. It is not technically possible.”

One of the department store managers spoke of under-14s attempting to steal larger items like air fryers and even TVs, and how, if they were confronted by staff and their pathway out of the store was blocked, they would simply smash the items on the floor. They would just smash them on the floor, because they cannot commit a crime; it is not possible.

We heard from another area manager who talked of gangs of youths who travel from store to store, and town centre to town centre, on public transport on theft sprees. They speak of these gangs of seven to 10 individuals who nominate their under-14 members to do the actual theft.

I specifically asked the AFP officer at the forum about the extent of his powers to deal with a 15-year-old offender as compared to a 13-year-old offender. He sighed and put his head in his hands, and he spoke about an incident during which he had wrestled a shoplifter to the deck at Westfield Belconnen, only to discover that the offender was under 14. He said, "I just had to let him go."

Now, the same copper, I am assuming, was given advice from the minister's Chief of Staff—who was in the room at the time—and he returned to the microphone 15 minutes later to correct the record and say that he would have the ability to refer the shoplifter to diversionary pathways.

The PCYC representative instantly stood, at that forum, to say that the diversion pathways were a complete waste of time; that they were not sufficiently resourced; that very few were participating; that the diversion pathways are not compulsory; and that they are not impacting this cohort of criminals-who-are-not-actually-criminals.

I am pleased to hear some of the details of those pathways today, and I note that we will be debating this space later in the week, because it is important.

I want to end with the following question. There are 1,100 Woolworths outlets in Australia; there are a lot of Woollies outlets. Which store do you think is suffering the highest losses in theft right across Australia? Across the whole nation, which Woolworths outlet is suffering the highest losses in theft? It is in Ms Stephen-Smith's electorate. According to my information, it is Dickson. So well done, Canberra, because we are certainly leading the nation on some fronts and I think we should be proud of it. Thank you.

**MS VASSAROTTI** (Kurrajong) (11.44): I am really pleased to stand up today on the one-year anniversary of raising the minimum age of criminal responsibility. Before I go to my remarks, I want to comment in terms of some of Mr Parton's commentary around the unintended consequences of this important reform. I think that it does display quite a significant misunderstanding of what this reform is about, because it is not about the removal of accountability; it is about an issue around criminal responsibility and going to jail.

I think it would be potentially useful for Mr Parton, in addition to listening to some of the information that has been provided today, to get some additional briefing to actually understand a bit more about the reform and how it is actually working to support young

people; not to say that there is not accountability, but actually to develop pathways to deal with the very complex issues of some young people's lives.

I will note that raising the minimum age of criminal responsibility is a Greens' reform which we took to previous elections and which was passed with the hard work of former Attorney-General Shane Rattenbury, who has only just left this place, as well as significant work by former minister Emma Davidson. They should consider raising the age of criminal responsibility to be one of the greatest achievements of their time in this place, and the Greens should be very proud that they were able to introduce a reform like this in the ACT. I am really proud to be here to continue this legacy. I will always be the champion for the ongoing work required to make this reform work—because it is hard and it is nation-leading.

Before this reform, children as young as 10 years old could be charged, arrested and placed in detention. They could be placed in detention on remand, which means that they were in prison before they were found guilty of a crime, even though we knew that children between 10 and 13 who engage in harmful behaviour often do so because of trauma, abuse, neglect, homelessness, unmet disability needs or unmet mental health needs. By putting these children in prison, we were actually letting them and the community down. It was clear from all the medical evidence that children under 14 were very unlikely to understand the gravity of the criminal offence or be able to meaningfully engage in the criminal justice process.

As part of the shameful history of the colonisation of our country, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children were over-represented in the cohort of criminalised children and young people.

It does not help when we have people demonising young people and purporting that all crime is perpetrated by young people.

By putting children in prison, we were also letting the rest of us down—because when children and young people become involved in the criminal justice system, they often learn how to be criminals and, unsurprisingly, they have higher recidivism rates. Higher recidivism rates mean more crime, and this has worse community outcomes.

These groundbreaking reforms are something that all Canberrans should be proud of. When we introduced these reforms, we did realise it was hard, and we did not just raise the age and leave it at that. There were a range of supports that were being provided. Most significantly, the introduction of the therapeutic support panel is seen as a primary alternative to courts for children. This approach recognises that behind a child's harmful, risky or violent behaviour there is usually an unmet therapeutic support need, and that if we deal with these support needs, then we will reduce crime.

This does not only move us away from the idea of children engaging in this behaviour because of an inherent criminality; it also means that we invest in the support these children need, and that helps us all. It redirects children away from the system focused on crime and punishment, and instead shifts towards wraparound service delivery, youth support, family services and crisis response. It is not about ignoring criminal activity; it is about responding differently.

This makes Canberra a city that invests in our social fabric. The responses we design for our problems can actually improve outcomes for us all. They improve outcomes for the children themselves, their families and the broader community. This reform sets us down a new path where early intervention is key, and where children are supported to remain in their community, their country and their cultural heritage—because we know, particularly for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, culture is protective. It establishes restorative justice as the norm in the ACT, where we can strengthen social bonds, repair relationships and invest in outcomes for people.

I would like to commend the work of the therapeutic panel in particular, and, now more than ever, recognise that this government cannot rest on its laurels. We must ensure that the therapeutic support panel is properly funded and supported, particularly noting its engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families, ensuring that there are cultural supports in place.

Raising the age of criminal responsibility is not just an act of legislation; it is an ongoing commitment from the government and the people in this place. This commitment means that we must continue to think critically and build capacity to respond to the complex needs of young people who may otherwise interact with the criminal justice system. It is not about looking away or giving up hope; it is about leaning in and providing support. This is the next step in supporting the new age of criminal responsibility, and this is the work I will be advocating for as the Greens' spokesperson for justice. I commit to continuing the legacy of reform in this place. Thank you.

**MISS NUTTALL** (Brindabella) (11.51): I like everything my colleague, Ms Vassarotti, just said. It is a shame Mr Parton has left the chamber for this. It is very easy to buy into the cheap and easy characteristics of youth crime. We are seeing it in the media and most shamefully, we are seeing it in this place too. What is much harder is having a real conversation about what is causing people to engage in this harmful, risky and violent behaviour. It is harder to look at this behaviour and ask ourselves the question we need to, that is, how are we letting our young people down to the point where they feel that these behaviours are their only option?

As their elected representatives, it is our job to do this work, to challenge ourselves to not buy into reductive narratives that are around a false story, one that ultimately diminishes the humanity of young people who are struggling. The impact of the youth crime narrative is pervasive. I have spoken to students and educators alike who are sick of being the social punching bag for any antisocial behaviour in the area. I want to give a shout-out because Caroline Chisholm School is running an excellent social campaign right now talking about all of the brilliant work that they are doing and how proud their students are to be part of the Chisholm community. They came to the Tuggeranong Community Council to speak the other day because they could see that narrative of youth crime taking hold. They should not have to come out. They should be respected as young people in their own right.

Our young people deserve better. They have been left with a housing crisis, a climate crisis, an economy that only works for the one per cent and now we blame them for the circumstances that have caused them to act out. I really empathise with that frustration. It is challenging to sit there in hearings, in meetings and in this place and watch adults mentally limit the behaviour and worth of young people in our community and dismiss

them as bad kids, when the goal of this place and us as policy makers should be getting right to the source of why young people in our city are running up against the justice system before they find safety and support in their own community.

There is also the fact that overwhelming evidence shows that locking up kids does not work. It does not work, it does not help them in the long run and in turn, it brings worse outcomes for our communities. In fact, research, including but not limited to that from the Victorian sentencing council, found that offenders who were first sentenced at an earlier age tended to reoffend more regularly, violently and into adulthood, which begs the question, do we want to lock kids up or do we want to help them get better?

Children and young people in our community, especially those who engage in harmful, risky, violent and otherwise difficult behaviour, need our care and our attention first and foremost. They do not need to be locked away in prison. As I speak to the important reform that was raising the minimum age of criminal responsibility, I want to make it clear that the ACT Greens will keep fighting for further reforms that will do better for our young people, because the reality is we have a long way to go.

We have immense work to do in reforming our out-of-home care system. As we know, the current supports for those living in out-of-home care are inadequate. Our motion, which secured the development of an ACT Youth Homelessness Strategy, has sought to spur this work on, and I am committed to continuing to fight for young people in our territory to have proper supports. By raising the age of criminal responsibility, we show young people that we can do better by them. We must keep doing so.

Raising the age was about making Canberra a real human rights jurisdiction, a place where restorative justice is the norm in the ACT. The city young people are growing up in should be one where we seek to strengthen social values and repair relationships, rather than perpetuate a cycle of crime and punishment. That is what young people want, and crucially, it is what they deserve. I am proud to be a member of a party that introduced this integral reform. I am proud to be part of the party that will support the future of this reform every day.

**MR COCKS** (Murrumbidgee) (11.56): I want to reflect for a minute on some of the comments that have been made. In particular I want to thank Miss Nuttall because rather than only sticking to the Greens' ideology—and I understand where they come from—she asked a couple of important questions. One of those is why is it that our young people might be choosing to go down the path of antisocial behaviours and what, in people who are older, would be considered criminal behaviours?

I think that is a worthy question. I think it goes to the question of incentives because there are those people who are not young people, those who are adults, who will seek to take advantage of young people at vulnerable periods of their lives. There are those who will look at a 13-year-old young person and determine that that person cannot be held criminally responsible for their actions and therefore they are the person that they would like to influence to do something that they themselves cannot.

The impact of a reform like this cannot be simplified to the extent that the ideology behind it would like us to do. The reality on the ground, sadly, is that children and young people can be taken advantage of. If police are disempowered and unable to

engage productively and fully with a person who is just below the threshold of criminal responsibility, then there are those who will take advantage of it. There are those who will take advantage of that fact, and we are seeing that, because, make no mistake, the criminal elements that are out there are not dumb. For many out there, it is a business model. It is sadly part of human nature that you see around the world. This is the sort of thing that is taken advantage of in conflicts in West Africa, in places where child soldiers were recruited. There is an incentive for ill-intentioned adults to take advantage of young people. I think it is very important that the government take note of that incentive and make sure the structure of how we respond to crime enables us to put every disincentive in place to try and stop young people ever becoming involved in it.

Miss Nuttall talked about what teaches young people—I think this has been raised before by many—what teaches young people, why would young people become criminals? What teaches young people to engage in criminal behaviour is the opportunity and the mentoring of those who would like them to do it on their behalf. I think it is very important to recognise the reality of the situation, not just the ideology.

**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) (11.59): I was not going to speak, but I am deeply offended by Mr Parton’s comments and absolutely want to refute them. I was at the meeting as well, in Tuggeranong that the SDA put on, and I think I need to correct the record. Mr Parton’s inference that my chief of staff somehow influenced a police officer to change his story to the group—I completely reject that. I also reject—

**Mr Cocks:** Was there a conversation?

**DR PATERSON:** No, there was not a conversation. No.

**Mr Cocks:** No, they did not talk to you at all?

**DR PATERSON:** No. No. Absolutely not.

**MR ASSISTANT SPEAKER:** Thank you, Mr Cocks. Dr Paterson, please, continue. Address the chair, please.

**DR PATERSON:** Yes, okay. Sorry, Mr Assistant Speaker. So yes, I completely reject what Mr Cocks is saying there, that somehow myself or my chief of staff pressured a police officer to change his public story in the meeting, absolute—

**Mr Cocks:** Point of order, Mr Assistant Speaker.

**MR ASSISTANT SPEAKER:** Yes, Mr Cocks. Take a seat, Dr Paterson.

**Mr Cocks:** The minister has suggested that I have made comments which indeed I have not made. I asked a question as to whether there was in fact a conversation. The minister has responded. I made no assertions.

**DR PATERSON:** You just did. You were not there, Mr Cocks.

**MR ASSISTANT SPEAKER:** Thank you, Mr Cocks. Dr Paterson may continue.

**DR PATERSON:** I also reject that police cannot intervene. Police can absolutely intervene in a situation whether there is any form of harm or antisocial behaviour occurring in the community. Police can absolutely intervene. I also want to stress the importance of the raising the age reforms. It is absolutely critical that we seek a therapeutic approach to support these young people who come in contact with the justice system.

I would like to thank the Therapeutic Support Panel and the Safer Youth Response Service for the work that they do. They are absolutely our referral pathway for police. Police are the largest referrer to these services. The system is absolutely working. The evaluations of MACR as the stepped increase in the age reforms has come into place has demonstrated this.

If the Canberra Liberals, rather than consistently rejecting police data, actually looked at police data, what they would see is that youth crime remains very consistent in our community. It waxes and wanes over time but has largely remained consistent over the years. We also have not seen an increase necessarily in people under the age of 14 coming into contact with the justice system. Police are obviously deeply concerned when young people come into contact with the justice system. They are there to support them and they do not want to see a criminal approach to these young people. They want to see them helped and supported and a therapeutic approach taken to support their needs.

I am very proud to be part of a government that has implemented a range of measures and supports for young people, and I am proud that we are leading the way nationally because I think we need to set the example. We know there are endless decades of research outcomes that demonstrate how detrimental it is to the longer-term outcomes for a community, for community safety and for young people. If they have interactions early on with the justice system and if they end up in youth detention, their outcomes and likelihood of ending up in adult prisons and the adult justice system are significantly increased.

We will continue to work with not only government services but also our community services. I also strongly reject Mr Parton's claims about PCYC. They do an absolutely amazing job with this group of kids in the community that are really experiencing significant trauma and have experienced, a lot of them, significant harm and challenges, disability and mental ill health, all by the very early ages of 12, 13, 14, 15. These kids are often kids where they have felt that society has neglected them, has failed them. PCYC is there and supports these kids. There are other amazing organisations like the Ted Noffs Foundation that do incredible work with young people as well in our community. I thank them and I thank the Youth Coalition for the work that they do.

I think it is a very damaging narrative that the Canberra Liberals and other conservative governments around the country push around this issue. I am very proud to firmly stand in support of our young people and to work with them and to see that we apply a therapeutic approach to supporting them.

**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) (12.04), in reply: I really set the cat amongst the pigeons on this one. I was not expecting so many contributions this morning. I would like to thank all members for those contributions, however. I think it is always important that members place on the record their views in relation to all matters.

I would particularly like to respond to some of the comments from Mr Parton, and to Mr Cocks to some extent as well. Some of the instances that Mr Parton made reference to in his contribution before are alarming. They are concerning and they are matters that deserve a response. All instances of harmful and unlawful behaviour are concerning. Now, what has not changed, with any of these reforms, is that when someone sees these things occurring, they should contact the police. If you see those things occurring, if you are a victim to those behaviours, please, contact the police. That has not changed.

What has changed is the response to that young person after that initial response. Instead of proceeding through the criminal justice system following an interaction with police, a young person in that age cohort is likely to then engage with the Safer Youth Response Service, and then potentially through the Therapeutic Support Panel, potentially to an ITO, intensive therapeutic order. So we have not removed a response to young people that engage in these harmful behaviours, we have put in place a different one that is more effective at supporting what these young people actually need.

We are not immune from crime in the ACT. Bad things can and do happen in our community. That is also the case for the rest of the country. We are seeing the types of offending from young people change right across the country and that is something that we will seek to respond to appropriately with the best evidence we can. That is what we are doing here in the ACT by putting a therapeutic response forward for these particularly young people.

Now, Mr Cocks made, I think, a strange suggestion that somehow we would protect young people by lowering the age of criminal responsibility. I am not sure I could accept that logic, but it was put out there on the public record. Ultimately, I am incredibly grateful for what I think is the undertone to this conversation, the motion that Mr Parton has put on the notice paper for later this week, which I think is mostly grounded in a shared commitment to therapeutic responses for young people, embracing diversion for some of the youngest, most complex, vulnerable young people in our community that deserve our care, need our care, and for too long, did not receive that. Instead, those young people proceeded through the criminal justice system, institutionalising them and not leading to better outcomes for the community. So I would like to thank all members once again for their contributions and I look forward to the motion later this week.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

### **Standing orders—suspension**

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

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

- (1) any business before the Assembly at 5 pm on Wednesday, 10 June 2026 being interrupted to allow the Treasurer to be called on forthwith to present the Appropriation Bill 2026-2027 and the Appropriation (Office of the Legislative Assembly) Bill 2026-2027;
- (2) where business before the Assembly has concluded before 5 pm on 10 June 2026, the Assembly shall suspend proceedings and reconvene at 5 pm to allow the Treasurer to be called on forthwith to present the Appropriation Bill 2026-2027 and the Appropriation (Office of the Legislative Assembly) Bill 2026-2027;
- (3) at 5 pm on Friday, 12 June 2026, the order of the day for the resumption of debate on the question that the Appropriation Bill 2026-2027 and the Appropriation (Office of the Legislative Assembly) Bill 2026-2027 be agreed to in principle, being called on notwithstanding any business before the Assembly;
- (4) debate on any motion before the Assembly at the time of interruption being adjourned until the adjournment questions in relation to the Appropriation Bill 2026-2027 and the Appropriation (Office of the Legislative Assembly) Bill 2026-2027 are determined; and
- (5) where business before the Assembly has concluded before 5 pm on 12 June 2026, the Assembly shall suspend proceedings and reconvene at 5 pm to allow resumption of debate on the question that the Appropriation Bill 2026-2027 and the Appropriation (Office of the Legislative Assembly) Bill 2026-2027 be agreed to in principle.

## **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 Assembly business and committee business scheduled for today being called on at a later hour this day.

**Sitting suspended from 12.11 to 2.00 pm.**

## **Questions without notice**

### **Procurement—Secure Local Jobs Code**

**MR PARTON:** My question is to the finance minister. Minister, Queensland has suspended its best practice industry conditions on new government funded construction projects and has now committed to permanently remove best practice industry conditions from procurement policy as a part of its construction productivity reforms, after analysis showed the massive cost of union influence to procurement and housing. Who would have thought!

Minister noting the recent announcements pushing back infrastructure projects, has your government done any investigation of unnecessary cost to projects imposed by your procurement policy?

**MS STEPHEN-SMITH:** I thank the Leader of the Opposition for the question. We

have in fact been working closely with the construction industry and the relevant unions in relation to construction industry best practice, and that is part of our commitment to ensuring that the construction industry is a diverse workforce, including more women in construction, more tradies, more apprentices and trainees, more Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, and diverse workers having opportunity in the construction sector.

There is no evidence that we are paying over the odds for our construction projects. We do demand value for money for our construction projects, but value for money for ACT taxpayers is not just about the lowest common denominator. It is not just about the lowest price. It is about the outcomes that a project delivers for the ACT community—the services it delivers, and the jobs that it creates.

**MR PARTON:** Minister, if Queensland can review and unwind procurement rules that were driving up costs and reducing productivity, why is the ACT government unwilling to even test whether its own rules are making housing and infrastructure more expensive in Canberra?

**MS STEPHEN-SMITH:** I did not say that. In fact, one of the things that Procurement ACT is doing is looking across the range of procurement requirements, recognising that Infrastructure Canberra actually manages infrastructure procurement quite specifically. Procurement ACT has been looking at all of the requirements under the Secure Local Jobs Code, the local industry participation plan and the procurement values, and making sure that we are streamlining for industry as much as possible when it comes to goods and services procurement.

**MR COCKS:** Minister, how many projects need to be deferred or delayed before your government accepts that your own procurement rules might be part of the cost problem?

**MS STEPHEN-SMITH:** Thank you, Mr Cocks, for the question. But, Mr Speaker, I think Mr Cocks is drawing a long bow there.

The decisions that have been made and that the Chief Minister announced in relation to this budget are around looking at what has historically been able to be delivered within the ACT and what is fiscally responsible across the forward estimates for the infrastructure program and bringing those two things together. They are about looking at the degree to which projects have been delayed in the past—that is everything from delay through processes of development application, delay through impacts of market conditions and supply chain interruptions—and at what we can realistically deliver, what the market can realistically deliver and what we can realistically afford. This process is unrelated to the processes we have in place to ensure that we are delivering value for money through our procurements for the ACT community, where we recognise that value for money is about more than just the lowest cost. It is about the quality of the project. It is about the project meeting the needs of the Canberra community. It is about providing jobs. It is about ensuring that workers are treated fairly and that we are promoting and securing diversity across all of our industries.

### **Budget—infrastructure projects**

**MS CASTLEY:** My question is to the Chief Minister. A number of people in my

community voted Labor in 2024 because your government promised that much-needed local infrastructure would be delivered this term, including new sporting facilities, the Casey health centre and an ESA facility. It now appears that none of these will be delivered in this term. Chief Minister, do those voters have a right to feel let down by Labor?

**MR BARR:** I thank Ms Castley for the question. I do not think that the substance of the question reflects the government's announcements today. Of course, I will not pre-empt the Treasurer's budget speech at 5 o'clock.

What I have said on the public record in relation to those Casey projects is that they will proceed; the government will examine their delivery as part of next year's and the 2028 budget processes. We are just being clear that they will not be in the budget that the Treasurer delivers this afternoon. I have already said that, so I am not pre-empting debate. I just want to give that clarity to Ms Castley—that the government intends to deliver on its election commitments in this parliamentary term, but those projects are not going to be in this year's budget. We are focusing on delivering the projects in Ms Castley's electorate that are already under construction. We want to get them finished before we start new ones.

### **Procurement—Secure Local Jobs Code**

**MR PARTON:** My question is to the Minister for Finance. In late 2024, the Treasurer signed the Intergovernmental Agreement on National Competition Policy. That agreement says that governments should have transparent processes so decisions do not unnecessarily limit the number or range of market participants, and that governments are to maintain competition impact assessment processes for major decisions, including decisions to put in place or substantially update procurement frameworks. Minister, has the government undertaken analysis to determine whether the Secure Local Jobs Code has reduced the number or diversity of businesses tendering for ACT construction projects?

**MS STEPHEN-SMITH:** I will take the question on notice, but I have not seen any evidence that the Secure Local Jobs Code is having that impact. In fact, it was the Legislative Assembly that passed the secure local jobs legislation, and we have a well-established framework now. Part of the impetus for delivering the secure local jobs policy and code was to ensure that those businesses that are doing the right thing by their workers, those businesses that are upholding ethical standards, and those businesses that have a good labour relations training and workplace equity plan are on a level playing field, and that those businesses that are ripping off workers and those businesses that are not conducting themselves ethically do not get an advantage in the procurement process by being able to underbid those that are doing the right thing by their workers.

We will stand up for workers. We are the Labor Party; we will stand up for workers. We will stand up for workers in the construction industry while those opposite denigrate the right of construction industry workers to fair work conditions and rights.

**MR PARTON:** Minister, why did your government sign up to a competition impact assessment requirement and then fail to apply it to one of Australia's most

interventionist procurement frameworks?

**MS STEPHEN-SMITH:** Given that I took the last question on notice about whether that analysis has been done, I think Mr Parton is drawing conclusions in saying that it has not been.

**MR CAIN:** Minister, why does your government continue with the so-called Secure Local Jobs Code when it is reducing competition and driving up costs of infrastructure and housing?

**MS STEPHEN-SMITH:** I reject the premise of Mr Cain's question. There is no evidence that it is driving up costs across either civil infrastructure or, indeed, housing. I note that most housing is not procured by the ACT government and it is a competitive market. For the rest of Mr Cain's question, I refer him to my first answer.

### **North Canberra Hospital—obstetrics and midwifery**

**MS CLAY:** My question is to the Minister for Health. I am aware that there was consultation with consumers on the business day before the government announced the \$1.5 billion to be spent on the new north-side hospital. People who attended tell me there is no longer going to be a birth centre fully separate to the hospital, despite the fact that: over 3,000 Canberrans petitioned for one, the Assembly passed a motion calling for a feasibility study into one, that feasibility study recommended a separate birth centre, and the supply and confidence agreement with the Greens agreed to one. C-section rates have shot up to almost 50 per cent, but now the new \$1.5 billion hospital will replicate the system that has led to that.

Under your plans, Minister, will the birth suite and birth centre inside the hospital have the same number of birth centre and birth suite beds as are inside the hospital now?

**MS STEPHEN-SMITH:** As Ms Clay is aware, the current planning does have six birth suites and two birth centre rooms, which is the same as the current number of rooms and suites in the North Canberra Hospital. However, as I have repeatedly told Ms Clay, no final decision has been made on this matter.

She is correct that there has been extensive consultation with consumers as well as with midwives, obstetricians and other staff and experts about this particular project and this particular element of the project. This includes a four-hour workshop with clinicians, midwives, consumers, birth centre advocates, health consumer advocates and others on 29 May. A four-hour workshop was held to do the co-design work for the birth centre. As Ms Clay is aware—but for the information of other members—there are some constraints in building on a brownfield site. Two options have been considered and discussed with the working group, which included midwives and consumers, and then with the broader forum round table on 29 May.

We remain committed to a co-designed birth centre at the north-side hospital. Ms Clay misrepresents what is currently what is currently proposed when she says it simply replicates what is in the current hospital. What is currently proposed—and it is not a final decision—is a birth centre with a completely separate entrance; a completely separate outdoor space on the ground floor, so you do not need to go through any

clinical areas to get to it; and a backdoor that lets you into the hospital and then up to level 5 if you need to escalate your care to a birth suite at that time. It is not as she has represented it in her question.

**MS CLAY:** Minister, how will the new hospital keep pace with population growth and increased continuity of care targets without expanding bed numbers?

**MS STEPHEN-SMITH:** This is a question that I, myself, have asked officials on numerous occasions. I have sought assurance on multiple occasions and asked them to redo the modelling and redo the modelling to ensure that six suites and two birth centre rooms would be sufficient. My expectation is that we will probably end up with more. But that work, as I have said, is not finalised; it is still underway. But if we do end up with more that would be in the birth centre and not in the suites.

The birth centre feasibility study, which is publicly available and has been for some time, shows the projections of births for the ACT to 2060. It shows an expectation that births will reduce on the south side and increase on the north side. Obviously, as Canberra's tertiary hospital, while residents might be resident in the north side, people will continue to birth in Canberra Hospital when they have higher-risk pregnancies—which is quite a significant proportion of the births in the ACT.

In addition, I would expect, through the expansion of the continuity program, that we may see more people accessing options like homebirth. I think 29 people last year had their baby through homebirth. This is an opportunity at some future point for the completely freestanding type of birth centre that Ms Clay has been talking about—essentially, a place where people who would otherwise choose a homebirth but do not have the right place to have a homebirth, as their home is not appropriate or they do not want to birth there, would be able to birth there. Effectively, that type of continuity model is a very similar model to a homebirth model. Then we have the standalone or alongside on the north-side hospital, which is the project that is currently underway.

**MS VASSAROTTI:** Does the government have any plans to build a freestanding birth centre separate to a hospital in Canberra?

**MS STEPHEN-SMITH:** I welcome Ms Vassarotti back to the Assembly, and I am very pleased to have received her first question—albeit a supplementary—on this very important topic. Considerable work has been done on this project. We committed to a co-designed process. We committed to a feasibility study. We committed to working with midwives, with advocates and with consumers around this work. We undertook a feasibility study, and that is publicly available. It identified that a completely freestanding birth centre away from a hospital campus is not currently a viable or preferred option for the ACT.

That does not mean that it is ruled out forever, but we are focused on the project that we have committed to deliver as a result of that feasibility study and as a result of the co-designed process. As I said to Ms Clay earlier in our email correspondence, “co-design” is exactly that: it is about collaboration, cooperation and working together. It is not about a small group of advocates or a small number of members of this Legislative Assembly dictating the outcome for other people on where they are going to work and where they are going to give birth.

A lot of work has been done to understand the feasibility of the range of options. It has been broadly agreed that a standalone birth centre on the new north-side hospital campus will be the best solution. But there are site constraints on a brownfield site. So the option that we are currently consulting on is on the ground floor of the stage 1 build. But I have said to advocates and I have said to Ms Clay that that is the stage 1 build. We could also look at “this is a temporary solution for stage 1” and then we build a standalone when we have had the opportunity to demolish some of the other buildings in stage 2 of the project. All options remain on the table at this point, and saying that we have locked in what is currently there is completely and utterly untrue.

### **Alexander Maconochie Centre—use of force**

**MR EMERSON:** My question is to the Minister for Corrections. The latest Inspector of Custodial Services report details a confronting case of use of force in the Alexander Maconochie Centre. An Aboriginal woman experiencing significant mental health issues, including engaging in self-harm, was not allowed to attend NAIDOC celebrations at the prison. She protested this refusal by entering into a prohibited area and was punished with 28 days of separate confinement, in the middle of a mental health crisis.

During her time in confinement, she requested to join another Aboriginal program but was declined. Shortly after she engaged in serious self-harm by strangulation. Corrections officers responded by calling a code black personal threat, rather than a code blue medical emergency, meaning Justice Health staff were not notified. In order to stop the woman self-harming, the officers used pepper spray and forcefully transferred her to the Crisis Support Unit without any health assessment. She was not seen by a medical officer until the following day.

Minister, is it the government’s position that this is an appropriate response to a detainee experiencing a mental health crisis?

**DR PATERSON:** I thank Mr Emerson for the question, and I would like to thank the Inspector of Corrective Services for her report into this critical incident. This report is very thorough and is quite an upsetting read. It presents a number of recommendations, which the government will work through, and work with ACT Corrective Services, to respond to those recommendations more formally.

**Mr Emerson:** Point of order on responsiveness to the question under standing order 118AA. The question was whether it is a government position that this is an appropriate response to a detainee experiencing a mental health crisis. We heard that there will be a forthcoming response to the recommendations and a welcoming of the report, but no response to that question.

**MR SPEAKER:** On the point of order—

**DR PATERSON:** Yes, I can further answer the question. Would that help?

**MR SPEAKER:** Okay, crack on.

**DR PATERSON:** So yes, we will continue to work with ACT Corrective Services. This is obviously a recommendation in the report that was presented to government so we will work to respond to that report more formally. We are absolutely focused on trauma-informed best practice care for people who are experiencing a mental health crisis in our prison. This is an ongoing issue which multiple detainees experience during their time in detention, and we are working with Justice Health.

We had a joint briefing, the Minister for Health and I, the other day, looking at how we can better support detainees within the AMC who are experiencing a mental health crisis. We were looking at how we can have better trauma-informed approaches. It is a very, very challenging workplace in which corrective services work. There are a lot of competing demands and a lot of very significant threats to their safety that they are presented with on a daily basis as—*(Time expired.)*

**MR EMERSON:** Minister, will the government now reconsider its position on providing corrections officers with body-worn cameras, given this was a key recommendation of the 2025 Healthy Prison Review and is now a finding of this review as well?

**DR PATERSON:** Look, we will consider it. The government is not opposed to this. I guess it is just an extra expense, and we have a whole range of cost pressures and competing expenses as well as significant population stresses within the AMC at the moment. The premise of Mr Emerson's original question is really around the significant issues and mental health crisis issues that Corrective Services are presented with every single day, so we will continue to explore and look at the idea of body-worn cameras within the prison, but at the moment it is not a priority.

**MS CARRICK:** Minister, is it common for code blacks instead of code blues to be called in response to a mental health crisis at the AMC?

**DR PATERSON:** I will have to take that on notice.

### **Procurement—Secure Local Jobs Code—Future Form**

**MR COCKS:** My question is to the Minister for Skills, Training and Industrial Relations.

Minister, last week you were unable to identify how many additional ACT residents, apprentices or local subcontractors had gained work because of the so-called Secure Local Jobs Code, and you were not aware of any independent review showing that the regime delivers better outcomes for local workers and businesses.

The CFMEU administrator has described the Secure Local Jobs Code-certified Future Form as “one of the worst employers in the industry” and said legal action is being finalised over alleged sham contracting. Minister, is the Secure Local Jobs Code actually harming some ACT workers? And is it delivering value for taxpayers?

**MR PETTERSSON:** I thank Mr Cocks and the Canberra Liberals for their newfound interest in the wellbeing of working people in this city. It is reassuring to see their

continued interest.

*Mr Cain interjecting—*

**Mr Cocks:** Point of order: the Minister has opened his response by debating the question, by suggesting the Canberra Liberals' interest in the question is new.

**MR SPEAKER:** I do not think he was debating it. It is arguable that he was being ironic, but I think it is clear he was not debating it, so there is no point of order.

**Mr Cain:** He was clearly insulting us. Not appreciated, Minister. Not appreciated.

**MR PETTERSSON:** Thank you, Mr Speaker. I apologise to the Canberra Liberals; I did not realise that was such a sore point for them.

The Secure Local Jobs Code seeks to ensure standards in relation to industrial relations and work health and safety are complied with, for territory-funded work. Secure local jobs refers to the application of code requirements based on where the job is undertaken, not where the personal entity is based, or comes from to complete a job. In other words, the Secure Local Jobs Code applies to where the job is being undertaken. The Local Industry Participation Policy, or LIPP, aims to promote the development and growth of the broader Canberra region economy. Local industry participation under the LIPP is about supporting and growing local businesses—particularly small to medium enterprises—through economic contribution or engaging local businesses to perform ACT government work.

In essence, the Secure Local Jobs Code is about ensuring the people who undertake work here in the ACT meet their legal requirements, to make sure that they do not undercut otherwise upstanding businesses that are trying to do the right thing.

If the Canberra Liberals are interested in how we go about promoting employment here in the ACT, it is through the LIPP.

**MR COCKS:** Minister, why should Canberrans have any confidence that the so-called Secure Local Jobs Code has any benefits for secure local jobs?

**MR PETTERSSON:** I have to refer Mr Cocks to my previous answer, which I do not think he listened to. The Secure Local Jobs Code is about ensuring that people that undertake territory-funded work are complying with the law.

**Mr Cocks:** I listened. So, it has nothing to do with secure local jobs?

**MR PETTERSSON:** Mr Cocks, I quite literally just read to you the difference between the two schemes.

The line of questioning that they are insistent upon goes to local industry participation. The Secure Local Jobs Code is an entirely separate policy that is trying to respond to noncompliance with industrial laws.

**MR PARTON:** Minister, what action have you taken since the allegations made against

Future Form were brought to your attention, to ensure that the Secure Local Jobs Code is actually working?

**MR PETTERSSON:** I thank Mr Parton for the question and his interest in ensuring that territory-funded work is undertaken by those who meet the highest ethical standards. That is a question for the registrar. I will take on notice any actions they are undertaking.

### **Justice—ACT Law Courts**

**MS BARRY:** Mr Speaker, my question is to the Attorney-General. The Productivity Commissioner's latest courts data highlights the deeply disturbing condition of ACT courts, particularly in comparison to other jurisdictions. Minister, why does the ACT have fewer full-time equivalent judicial officers per capita than any jurisdiction in the country?

**MS CHEYNE:** I thank Ms Barry for the question.

There are several reasons for this, Mr Speaker, as you yourself would know as a former shadow in this portfolio as well. One is that we do not have a district court level. So at the ACT level we have just two levels of courts with the Magistrates Court and the Supreme Court. That necessarily means we are going to have fewer judicial officers.

Secondly, we are a small jurisdiction. The court system was a product of decisions made before and then soon after self-government. Of course, we are constantly looking at the judicial resourcing of our courts. I would point Ms Barry to the budget initiative of last year, where we increased the number of magistrates, and all of the associated funding that came with that. It is something that we are constantly looking at. But the number of judicial officers is not necessarily the measure that we would be hanging everything on when it comes to the efficiency and the standards of our courts.

**MS BARRY:** Minister, why is real net recurrent expenditure on criminal and civil finalisations in the ACT the most expensive in the country, while our clearance rate remains one of the worst?

**MS CHEYNE:** I will see if there is any more detail that I can provide, but the short answer is that we have seen a significant increase in the number of trial matters, particularly relating to sexual assault matters. That means, necessarily, that they are complex. I think members would know, if they have paid attention to the media in recent times, that some of those juries have not been able to come to a conclusion and have been discharged. That usually means that there needs to be another trial. So all of those complications can add to longer times and can mean that the conclusion of matters takes longer.

**MS LEE:** Attorney-General, why are Canberra taxpayers paying excessively more than taxpayers in other jurisdictions and still getting a less efficient justice system?

**MS CHEYNE:** They are not getting less efficient justice system. Mr Speaker, I think I have been clear that the way that the ACT has been set up and how it currently works—

*Members interjecting—*

**MS CHEYNE:** Mr Speaker, I cannot even hear myself think.

**Mr Parton:** She's not that loud. She's pretty low with the interjections.

**MR SPEAKER:** Members, comments through me.

*Mr Cain interjecting—*

**MS CHEYNE:** Thank you, Mr Speaker. If they are not interested in the answer, I will not give it.

*Opposition members interjecting—*

**Mr Cocks:** Point of order, Mr Speaker, under 118AA: I don't believe the minister has answered the question.

**MR SPEAKER:** The problem is that there were interjections which were basically preventing the answer. I will have a look at the *Hansard* and review it, but I remind members that, if they are going to interject while the minister is trying to answer the question so that she feels incapable of answering the question, it is going to be difficult for her to do so. I will have a look at the *Hansard* and get back to you.

*Mr Cain interjecting—*

**Mr Parton:** On the point of order, Mr Speaker, I would suggest that the level of interjections was not really at a high level. It's not a church or a library.

**MR SPEAKER:** I will take that point, Mr Parton. I have given you the approach I am going to take. I am going to review the *Hansard*, and I will consider that matter and get back to you.

*Ms Cheyne interjecting—*

*Mr Cain interjecting—*

### **Budget—homelessness services**

**MS TOUGH:** My question is to the Minister for Homes, Homelessness and New Suburbs. Minister, a recent pre-budget announcement identified funding to support a range of homelessness services. What investments is the ACT government making in this budget to help people experiencing or at risk of homelessness?

**MS BERRY:** I thank Ms Tough for the question. As members may be aware, last month the ACT government announced that it would provide \$15.4 million in new and expanded funding to support more homelessness services in the ACT. This includes \$2.3 million for Samaritan House, a 13-bed crisis accommodation facility for men experiencing homelessness, \$1.4 million for Blue Door, a drop-in centre that provides

free midday meals, hygiene supplies, clothing and furniture vouchers, as well as life skills information, advice, advocacy and referrals, \$2.1 million for Roadhouse, which offers free evening meals, material aid supports and referrals, \$2.417 million to continue the Oaks Estate Community Inclusion Program, and \$1.077 million to support ACT Shelter.

**MS TOUGH:** Minister, why are these investments important?

**MS BERRY:** I thank Ms Tough for the supplementary. Everyone deserves a safe and stable place to call home. This investment strengthens the government's response to the growing pressure that we are seeing across the homelessness service system here in the ACT. By expanding housing options and backing frontline services, the ACT government is making sure that more Canberrans can get the support that they need, not just to find housing, but to keep it and rebuild their lives. These investments also help to ensure that the long-term viability of community service organisations who deliver these critical services continues.

**MR WERNER-GIBBINGS:** Minister, is the government focusing on any particular groups of people experiencing or at risk of homelessness?

**MS BERRY:** I thank Mr Werner-Gibbings for his supplementary. As well as chronic homelessness and crisis accommodation for people escaping domestic and family violence, youth homelessness has been a high priority for this government. I am pleased to say that this budget also includes \$872,000 in new funding over four years to support Our Place in Braddon. Our Place has 25 places for young people at risk of homelessness and it is an important complement to the new 20-place Youth Foyer facility which has recently opened in Woden.

### **Alexander Maconochie Centre—racism**

**MS VASSAROTTI:** My question is to Minister Paterson, the Minister for Corrections. It goes to the critical incident that Mr Emerson spoke about earlier in his question. I will not go through the details of the incident, given the significant distress even in reading it.

Given the government claimed in 2025 that it was expanding meaningful activities, health care and cultural supports, particularly for First Nations women in the AMC, does the government see that this incident shows that standards are slipping backwards in relation to support, particularly for First Nations women in the facility?

**DR PATERSON:** I thank Ms Vassarotti for the question and welcome her back to the Assembly. I thank her for her interest in how we better support First Nations women within the AMC.

I reject that things are slipping. The critical incident report is a very distressing report and presents a lot of recommendations that need to be addressed, including recommendations for improvements in trauma-informed care of detainees. There has been significant work over the past few years to see improvements in activities—both educational opportunities and programs—that are offered to detainees, particularly women. It is an ongoing critical area that requires attention in terms of the challenges that women within the AMC face. A lot of them are in there for a very short time on

remand, so having programs and educational opportunities provided to them in such a short period of time presents a lot of challenges.

ACT Corrective Services are continuously looking at ways they can improve the culturally appropriate care of detainees. This critical incident report highlights a few issues in relation to this, but the commissioner is very cognisant of how we will work with AMC detainees who are of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander descent. This also speaks to the recommendations in the Jumbunna review. There is a whole raft of recommendations around how we better support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the prison system, and there is the ongoing board of inquiry, which there will be further discussion around.

**MS VASSAROTTI:** Will the government mandate any new direct measures targeting systemic racism in the AMC, given the report explicitly identified racism as a key factor in play?

**DR PATERSON:** We will respond to the recommendations of the report in due course, but this was also addressed and highlighted in the Jumbunna review. This is also an issue that we are working on through the terms of reference for the board of inquiry. I do not think that anyone believes that we will solve this issue overnight. This requires systemic change, and it is broader than just the corrections system. This is exactly what the Jumbunna report highlights: this is a whole-of-government issue that we need to address.

**MISS NUTTALL:** Minister, will there be disciplinary action against the officers involved? If not, why not?

**DR PATERSON:** I thank the member for the question. As I said, the report was released just a couple of days ago, so we will look at responding to that report directly in due course.

### **Domestic Violence Crisis Service—crisis line**

**MS BARRY:** My question is to the Minister for the Prevention of Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence. The Domestic Violence Crisis Service last year reported that only half of all calls to its crisis line were answered, with some victims waiting days to hear back. Minister, what is the current rate of calls to the DVCS crisis line left unanswered?

**DR PATERSON:** The member will have to speak directly to the Domestic Violence Crisis Service for the exact number. But what we have heard about over the last couple of years is the significant pressure on our domestic, family and sexual violence services within the ACT. That is why we have progressed subsequent year-on-year increases to funding to these services. Last year there was a significant uplift in funding for, particularly, the call services of DVCS and CRCC. We extended and expanded that funding this year in the budget and provided ongoing funding for their core funding. We have also uplifted their funding this year as well.

We will continue to work with the Domestic Violence Crisis Service, who do an incredible job in our community. We have definitely heard their calls, and we have responded in this budget.

**MS BARRY:** Minister, have you investigated a correlation between the rate of unanswered calls and the 170 per cent increase in sexual violence offences in Canberra over the past four years?

**DR PATERSON:** I think Ms Barry is conflating different things. I am not entirely sure what the question is. The rates of calls to the Domestic Violence Crisis Service are specific to domestic violence crises that people might be experiencing in the community. The Canberra Rape Crisis Centre is our sexual violence service here in the ACT. That is a service that has also been under a lot of pressure with year-on-year increases in demand for their service and for counselling. We are working with both those services and the multiple other services in our community that work with victim-survivors of domestic and family violence, and we will continue to do that.

**MS LEE:** Minister, why do you not know the number of unanswered calls from a body that is receiving government funding? And what is the acceptable rate of unanswered calls?

**DR PATERSON:** This is really a question for the Domestic Violence Crisis Service in terms of the work—

**Ms Lee:** You are the minister. They get government funding. Do you not know? Do you not ask?

**DR PATERSON:** The ACT government funds the Domestic Violence Crisis Service through their core contract for a range of functions—and one of them is a 24-hour crisis service. We have seen a year-on-year increase to funding to the Domestic Violence Crisis Service, recognising the significant impost and demand on their service for people in our community. This demand for the Domestic Violence Crisis Service is also represented in ACT Policing and the year-on-year increase in the reporting of domestic, family and sexual violence.

We will continue to work with the service. I have met with the board of DVCS, and I will go back and meet with the board again. I continue to receive updates and work very closely with the CEOs of these services. They do an absolutely fantastic job. We were very proud to announce the funding uplift and to announce the ongoing funding for their core contracts, which they are currently in negotiation on with the government.

### **Hybrid electric fire truck**

**MR MILLIGAN:** My question is to the Minister for Police, Fire and Emergency Services. Minister, a fuel consumption report recently released under FOI shows that the ACT's \$1.6 million hybrid electric fire truck was expected to have significantly lower fuel consumption than has occurred. The same report indicates that the diesel backup unit may have been manually engaged unnecessarily and that broader deployment across the ACT may have contributed to higher fuel use. Minister, is the government's \$1.6 million electric fire truck still using more diesel than expected?

**DR PATERSON:** I thank Mr Milligan for his interest in the electric fire truck. The chamber will be very excited to hear the electric fire truck is out and about in our

community. So the diesel reporting at that time came through the training and commissioning process of that vehicle. This was when the vehicle was under significant use and pressure while all our Fire and Rescue employees were being trained on the vehicle. It is intended that the vehicle is running on its electric battery when it is out and about in the community. So I think Mr Milligan has sort of misrepresented the data in that report.

**MR MILLIGAN:** Minister, was the truck's deployment pattern, as shown in the fuel consumption report, usual practice for a pumper based at Acton?

**DR PATERSON:** No, no it was not. This is why that period of time, when the truck was under intensive training with Fire and Rescue staff, was not a usual pattern of behaviour for the vehicle.

**MR CAIN:** Minister, was the truck deployed to incidents well outside of the Acton area in order to increase its recorded operational use?

**DR PATERSON:** No, not at all. It should be in operation all the time, 24/7, 365 days of the year. So it is, it is there. We want it out on the road and travelling all around the ACT all the time. That is what its intended purpose is and we are very glad and happy to see it back on the road.

### **ACT Ambulance Service—vehicle preparedness**

**MR PARTON:** My question is to the Minister for Police, Fire and Emergency Services. Minister, I have received some troubling allegations from an ACTAS staff member that medication management on vehicles and in stations is inconsistent; that drug checks are being missed or falsified; and that equipment checks and restocking after jobs are inconsistent, meaning that crews may arrive at life-threatening emergencies without the equipment or drugs they need. Minister, what assurance can you give Canberrans that every ACTAS vehicle is properly checked, stocked and clinically safe before it is deployed?

**DR PATERSON:** They are some pretty damning allegations that Mr Parton is making. He has not approached my office with any of those concerns. So, if he does have information regarding any of those claims, I would greatly appreciate if he could email my office this afternoon so we can follow up on these issues.

To my understanding and to my experience with our ACT Ambulance Service, they are absolutely best-practice and they absolutely take their handling of medications and their patients' safety incredibly seriously. We have some of the best patient satisfaction levels in the country.

I really encourage Mr Parton to email my office directly about the allegations because they are very serious.

**MR PARTON:** Minister, have any medication, drug-check or related discrepancies been formally recorded by ACTAS in the past 12 months?

**DR PATERSON:** I will have to take that on notice.

**MR MILLIGAN:** Minister, what process is in place to identify, escalate and rectify missed or falsified drug or equipment checks if they occur?

**DR PATERSON:** I believe I can speak strongly that there are very rigorous processes in place, in terms of management of medications within the ACT Ambulance Service. I am quite distressed about these questions. Again, if the Canberra Liberals have some allegations, or evidence of allegations, that they would like to present to me, I would be very grateful to hear them so we can follow up.

### **Budget—appropriation rollovers**

**MS CARRICK:** My question is to the Treasurer. Treasurer, over the last three years, total additional appropriations have been very significant: between \$489 million and \$691 million annually. A major component has been the section 16B rollovers—\$171 million and \$280 million over the last couple of years. There are also bring-forwards leading net 16B rollovers to be over \$100 million a year, but these are typically being disclosed months after the February budget review. The 2024-25 rollovers were approved in April 2025 but not presented to the Assembly until September 2025, well after the time the funds were used, leading to a lack of transparency.

Treasurer, why has the government only reported \$150,000 in section 16B rollovers to date for this year, and have you approved more rollovers from 2024-25 to 2025-26?

**MR STEEL:** I thank the member for her question. We report on the rollovers made under section 16B of the Financial Management Act when decisions are made. And there has been a long conversation that we have had, through various different inquiries that are underway, with Treasury officials and with Ms Carrick about the work that Treasury does with agencies to make sure that the section 16B rollover is required of undisbursed funds that were appropriated in the previous financial year and to make sure that they are still needed in the new financial year. Once the decision is made by me as Treasurer based on the Treasury advice, then we report in the usual way, transparently, with the next quarterly financial report. So, we have been doing that, and we welcome questions about that, and I will be reporting in the usual way on the decisions made about section 16B rollovers.

**MS CARRICK:** Treasurer, why were large rollovers needed in previous years but not this year?

**MR STEEL:** The year has not ended, Mr Speaker, so I will not pre-empt what decisions are made before the end of the financial year, but if they are made, then they will be reported accordingly.

**MR EMERSON:** Treasurer, can you provide more timely information about future rollovers so they are known ahead of the February budget review?

**MR STEEL:** This is a matter that the Select Committee on Financial Management and Government Procurement Legislative Compliance is inquiring into—the Financial Management Act. We have also committed to review the Financial Management Act. There is a range of different reporting timeframes that are now in the act as a result of

changes brought forward to the Assembly by the opposition. I think, as part of the work that we will consider, coming out of that committee inquiry and the review, is making sure that there is alignment of those. But we report on the decisions that are made, under the Financial Management Act. I have not recalled one instance as Treasurer where the public accounts committee has done an inquiry into the quarterly financial reports, including the section 16B rollovers that are attached. They are attached. It is all transparently reported, but there seems to be no interest, as far as I am aware, unless it was done in a private hearing, in what is actually presented.

We welcome the scrutiny. We are transparently reporting on these decisions, and they are there for everyone to see.

### **National Disability Insurance Scheme**

**MISS NUTTALL:** My question is to the Minister for Disability, Carers and Community Services. Minister, over the course of the week, the Australian Senate is running an inquiry into the NDIS Bill. When you look for the ACT government's submission or review the hearings schedule, the ACT government does not appear. Minister, have you made a submission on behalf of your government or people with a disability in the ACT? If not, why not?

**MS ORR:** I have been working with my state and territory counterparts. We have been in discussions about how best to represent our views and give our feedback on the bill, whether that is through a formal submission to the inquiry or through the Disability Reform Ministerial Council, which meets on a regular basis—more regularly than a lot of other ministerial councils—and it includes the federal government. We are working through that, and we are in conversation with the committee secretariat as well, to make sure that the options remain open, should we wish to make a submission, and if that is the course of action that we choose to take.

**MISS NUTTALL:** Minister, the Australian Human Rights Commission's submission to this bill, included a comment that:

The process for developing the Bill raises serious concerns regarding compliance with Australia's obligation under Article 4(3) of the CRPD to closely consult and actively involve people with disability in decision-making processes that affect them.

How would you respond to the Australian Human Rights Commission's submission?

**MS ORR:** At the risk of giving an opinion, I would point to the numerous pieces of feedback and input that have been received by the Senate inquiry around the two-week timeframe that has been provided to them to hold the inquiry and inform their report or recommendations on the bill to the federal parliament. I think it is fair to say that the number of people who have made a point about the two-week time period probably do have a point, in that it is quite short, given the extent of the bill and the quite large reforms that are coming forward.

**MR BRADDOCK:** Minister, how can you be sure that the National Disability Insurance Scheme Amendment (Securing the NDIS for Future Generations) Bill 2026

is compliant with the human rights of people with a disability?

**MS ORR:** Again, I am not lawyer, and I am not sure that I should be giving a legal opinion on the human rights element of its application. I would point out to the member that it is a federal parliament bill. As part of their processes, the federal government have to provide statements on how they believe it meets their legal obligations, including human rights. Should there be concerns about the bill as it passes through the federal parliament, certainly, that is a matter that should be dealt with through their processes. Certainly, as to giving legal opinions or interpretations of things, I will probably steer clear of that.

### **Budget—health care**

**MR WERNER-GIBBINGS:** My question is to the Minister for Health. Minister, a recent pre-budget announcement identified funding to health services. How does the ACT budget deliver on the ACT government's election commitment to establish new health services to keep pace with our growing city?

**Mr Parton:** What a great question.

**MS STEPHEN-SMITH:** I agree with the Leader of the Opposition, Mr Speaker: that was indeed a great question from Mr Werner-Gibbings.

The 2026-27 ACT budget will deliver on a vital range of critical service needs, including palliative care, supporting people at a higher risk of breast cancer, lung cancer specialist services, and paediatric orthopaedic services. ACT Labor identified these areas as priorities at the last election after listening and hearing the needs of Canberrans.

These investments reflect the government's commitment to improving access to health care and driving better health outcomes for the territory to meet the needs of our growing city, and include \$23.4 million to operate the new Acute Palliative Care Unit at Canberra Hospital, with construction expected to be complete in December this year. The new unit will provide a dedicated space that is culturally safe and trauma informed to support patients and their families when they need it most. This investment will initially fund eight beds, with capacity to expand to 12 beds over time.

An investment of \$3.9 million will provide better access to specialised lifesaving screening, treatment and support services at North Canberra Hospital for people at high risk of breast cancer. An injection of \$8.2 million will expand the Canberra Hospital Paediatric Fracture Clinic and establish a dedicated paediatric orthopaedic service, improving care closer to home for children with bone and soft tissue conditions. This is another example of our ongoing commitment to expanding paediatric health services where it is safe and sustainable to do so. We will invest more than \$12 million to increase lung cancer services, including the rapid access lung cancer clinic, supporting the delivery of the National Lung Cancer Screening Program and enabling earlier detection. The government will also invest more than \$169 million to continue its response to growing demand for and the rising cost of public health services. This investment, combined with the other initiatives in this package, will provide an additional more than \$230 million for our public hospital and community based health services and workforce over the next four years.

**MR WERNER-GIBBINGS:** Minister, how does the ACT budget support the delivery of the new north-side hospital?

**MS STEPHEN-SMITH:** I thank Mr Werner-Gibbings for his interest in the north-side hospital, despite representing the south part of Canberra. Canberrans use services right across our hospital system. The ACT 2026-27 budget delivers a carefully staged investment of \$1.34 billion over the next seven years for a new hospital on Canberra's north side, bringing the government's total commitment to the new north-side hospital to almost \$1.5 billion over a decade. With critical planning and early design work largely completed and early works underway, the construction of this vital infrastructure will support Canberrans into the future, with modern facilities and better patient access.

The new seven-storey clinical services building represents the first stage of redevelopment of the North Canberra Hospital campus and will include more than 300 treatment spaces, easy access to the emergency department for patients and ambulances, and modern spaces for patients and their families. Extensive consultation with clinicians, consumer advocates and community organisations has provided early and active involvement in shaping the design and planning to date, and that will continue.

Key features of the new hospital include a state-of-the-art emergency department with a dedicated paediatric short-stay unit and better support for mental health presentations; a modern 14-bed intensive care unit; a co-designed birth centre with new birthing suites, a maternity inpatient unit and special care nursery; eight operating theatres with futureproofing for two more to be brought online when required; two endoscopy suites with space for a third; more than 200 new beds in inpatient wards; and expanded outpatient spaces to support pre-admission clinics, specialised outpatient clinics and allied health clinics. The project will also include upgrades to the Haydon Drive intersections, more than 700 additional car parking spaces, and a new 100-place childcare centre, which will replace and expand the existing facility. North Canberra Hospital will continue to operate while construction is underway, and we thank staff and consumers in advance for their patience as the early works are getting underway.

**MS TOUGH:** Minister, how does the ACT budget support our vital health workforce that cares for our community?

**MS STEPHEN-SMITH:** I thank Ms Tough for the supplementary question. In addition to delivering state-of-the-art facilities for our health workforce to do their excellent work in, the 2026-27 budget will provide initiatives that support, grow and retain the ACT's health workforce. This includes a \$14.1 million investment to continue junior medical officer wellbeing and workforce initiatives. This investment will improve support for junior doctors and promote Canberra Health Services as an employer of choice. It will also provide continued wellbeing, pastoral care and career development initiatives to ensure doctors are supported both personally and professionally, including enhanced peer support programs, a dedicated psychologist for junior doctors, and improved training opportunities and roles to support early career development.

We have already seen strong results since these initiatives were introduced, with the national Medical Training Survey showing an increase in the proportion of junior doctors who would recommend their workplace, from 60 per cent in 2022 to 81 per cent in 2025, and those who feel their workplace supports wellbeing increasing from 64 per cent to more than 82 per cent over the same period. Retention of early career doctors has also improved, with intern retention increasing from 76 per cent to 85 per cent.

The 2026-27 budget also includes \$1.9 million over four years to boost the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health workforce in the ACT, which is essential for improving the health and wellbeing of First Nations communities. This funding will support Indigenous Allied Health Australia, or IAHA, to continue its Health Academy program in the ACT, training 30 students annually. In addition to finding employment as allied health assistants, graduates of the program often go on to pursue further study, including nursing and physiotherapy. It is always fantastic to go to IAHA Health Academy graduations and see young people and their families so proud of them.

### **Libraries ACT—opening hours**

**MR BRADDOCK:** My question is to the Minister for City and Government Services and relates to the government's announcement last week of changes to library hours. While I thank the minister for the briefing provided by officials, I still have some outstanding questions. Minister, the announcement included the following statement: "With the late-night sessions having largely served people collecting reserved items, options are being explored to allow reserved items to be picked up any time at key branches." Minister, when will Canberrans have the option to pick up reserved items out of hours?

**MS CHEYNE:** I thank Mr Braddock for his engagement on this issue over a considerable period of time, including since early last year, where we were in a position where our library branches were often subject to closing. I greatly appreciate how interested and engaged he has been, particularly for our staff. The short answer is that I expect that we will have 24/7 lockers in place across the network by the end of the year. We are in the final stages of procurement for a supplier for book lockers, which will provide a greater opportunity for Canberrans to collect their books at any time. Once they are in place, I think we will start with a few but we will make sure that they are spaced accordingly. Libraries ACT will track usage to help assess whether investment in further book lockers would be appropriate.

The independent review—which I know Mr Braddock has great familiarity with—found that most people attending in the evening sessions, in particular, were there to just collect and return items. That is one of the reasons that we are investing in these lockers while also keeping our library branch footprint the same.

**MR BRADDOCK:** Minister, is the ACT government relying on the National Library to meet the national benchmark standard of 64 opening hours per week per 100,000 people?

**MS CHEYNE:** No. We are obviously very glad that we have the National Library, the CIT and university libraries, and obviously the courts library as well, but the hours that we are using to assess ourselves against the benchmark standard are based only on the

nine Libraries ACT branches The 64 opening hours per 100,000 people translates to 320 open hours for a population of 500,000, which we are. So, following the changes, ACT Libraries will be operating for 400 hours. That is across our nine Libraries ACT branches, and 400 is obviously well in excess of 320.

**MS CLAY:** Minister, residents of West Belconnen will no longer have an option to attend the Kippax library on the weekend. Why is that?

**MS CHEYNE:** These changes are the result of recommendations from the independent working group's report. One of the themes running through that report is that it strongly encourages government with staff to look at the service offerings to assess the appropriateness of when we have been delivering the service and also ensuring that that offering aligns with our community's usage.

It is important to note, I think, that Kippax is not open on a Sunday, as it is, and on Saturdays our town centre branches right across the Libraries ACT network see about the double the visitors per hour that our community ones do. These changes mean that every region of Canberra will keep the fully Saturday library, with extended hours in Belconnen, Tuggeranong, Gungahlin, Woden and Dickson as well as Kingston on Tuesday and Saturday. The accessibility of our town centre branches is obviously supported by our transport model, which in and of itself is hub and spoke. That enables people to use public transport to access those services. Ultimately, these changes have allowed us to extend the opening hours of Kippax through the week, and they support the continued to delivery of services at all branches across the ACT, which I know was something that members were very interested in seeing.

**Mr Barr:** Further questions can be placed on the notice paper; thank you, Mr Speaker.

## **Minimum age of criminal responsibility—update**

**MR PARTON** (Brindabella—Leader of the Opposition) (3.04), by leave: I rise to correct the record. In response to a ministerial statement from Mr Petterson earlier today, while talking about the youth crime forum in Tuggeranong, I asserted that my assumption was that a police officer attending the forum had been given advice from the minister's chief of staff, who was in the room. There was nothing to indicate that that was the case. It was a reckless assertion of mine, so I withdraw that assertion and I apologise for any offence that was caused by making it.

## **Leave of absence**

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

That leave of absence be granted to Mrs Morris for this sitting week due to caregiving reasons.

## **Papers**

**Mr Speaker** presented the following papers:

Auditor-General Act, pursuant to section 17—Auditor-General's Report No

5/2026— Concession, rebate and social support schemes, dated 5 June 2026, including a corrigendum, undated.

Bills, referred to Committees, pursuant to standing order 174—Correspondence—Bills— Inquiry—Crimes (Coercive Control) Amendment Bill 2026—Letter to the Speaker from the Chair, Standing Committee on Legal Affairs, dated 3 June 2026.

Budget 2026-2027—Financial Management Act, pursuant to subsection 20AB—Recommended appropriation—Officers of the Assembly—Copy of letter from the Speaker to the Treasurer, dated 3 June 2026, together with the following attachments:

ACT Audit Office Draft 2026-27—Copy of letter to the Speaker from the ACT Auditor General, dated 28 May 2026.

ACT Electoral Commission 2026-27 recommended appropriation—Copy of letter to the Speaker from the ACT Electoral Commission, dated 26 May 2026.

ACT Integrity Commission 2026-27 recommended appropriation—Copy of letter to the Speaker from the ACT Integrity Commissioner, dated 26 May 2026.

ACT Ombudsman proposed funding for 2026-27—Copy of letter to the Speaker from the ACT Ombudsman and Inspector ACT Integrity Commission, dated 24 April 2026.

Custodial Inspector Act, pursuant to subsection 30(2)—Review of a Critical Incident by the ACT Custodial Inspector—A self-harm incident, involving a use of force at the Alexander Maconochie Centre 24 July 2025, dated June 2026.

Standing order 99B—Petitions—Referral advice—Correspondence—Not inquired into—

e-Pet 080-25 and Pet 021-26—Tuggeranong—Development of a state-of-the-art ice sports venue—Letter to the Speaker from the Chair, Standing Committee on Economics, Industry and Recreation, dated 3 June 2026.

e-Pet 003-26 and Pet 018-26—Aquatic Centre in Commonwealth Park—Inclusion of diving and deep water facilities—Letter to the Speaker from the Chair, Standing Committee on Economics, Industry and Recreation, dated 3 June 2026.

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

Bimberi Youth Justice Centre—Bimberi Headline Indicators Report—June 2026.

Respite Care Services—Improvement—Assembly resolution of 26 March 2026—Government response—Burrangiri Existing Building Assessment—GHD Design Report June 2026.

Cost of living crisis—Alleviation measures—Assembly resolution of 3 December 2025— Government response, dated June 2026.

Legal Affairs—Standing Committee—Report 5—Inquiry into Magistrates Court (Indicative Sentencing) Amendment Bill 2025—Government response, undated.

Our Booris, Our Way—Implementation Update—July to December 2025, together with a tabling statement.

Pets—Greater access to public transport and facilities—Assembly resolution of 26 February 2026—Government response, undated.

Public housing maintenance—Costing and performance data—Assembly resolution of 18 March 2026—Government response, dated June 2026.

Public transport concessions improvement—Assembly resolution of 23 October 2025— Government response, dated June 2026.

Social Policy—Standing Committee—Report 3—Inquiry into E-Petition 007-25: Build a new gym for Lyneham High School—Government response, undated.

Territory-owned Corporations Act, pursuant to subsection 19(3)—Statement of Corporate Intent—Icon Water—Business Strategy 2025 to 2035.

Tuggeranong Ice Sports Facility development—Assembly resolution of 26 June 2025 and Sporting facilities—Independent report—Assembly resolution of 5 February 2026— Government response.

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

Legislation Act, pursuant to section 64—

Electronic Conveyancing National Law (ACT)—Electronic Conveyancing National Law (ACT) Operating Requirements 2026—Disallowable Instrument DI2026-63 (LR, 26 May 2026).

Leases (Commercial and Retail) Act—Leases (Commercial and Retail) Amendment Regulation 2026 (No 1)—Subordinate Law SL2026-5 (LR, 21 May 2026).

Legal Profession Act—Legal Profession (Solicitors Practising Fees) Determination 2026—Disallowable Instrument DI2026-77 (LR, 9 June 2026).

Long Service Leave (Portable Schemes) Act—Long Service Leave (Portable Schemes) Limitation to Coverage Declaration 2026—Disallowable Instrument DI2026-62 (LR, 18 May 2026).

Nature Conservation Act—Nature Conservation (Exempt Animals) Declaration 2026— Disallowable Instrument DI2026-61 (LR, 14 May 2026).

University of Canberra Act—University of Canberra Council Appointment 2026 (No 1)— Disallowable Instrument DI2026-60 (LR, 14 May 2026).

## **Animals—wildlife conservation support**

**MS TOUGH** (Brindabella) (3.07): I move:

That this Assembly:

(1) notes that:

(a) hands-on field work with ACT wildlife, such as health assessment, sampling, tagging and non-lethal fertility control routinely depends on first anaesthetising or sedating the animal, including in remote locations;

(b) under:

(i) the Veterinary Practice Regulation 2018:

(A) administering an anaesthetic agent without the immediate and direct supervision of a veterinarian is a restricted act (schedule 1, part 1.2, item 3); and

(B) carrying out treatments, procedures or tests that should not be carried out unless the animal is sedated is a restricted act (schedule 1, part 1.2, items 1-2), as is taking tissue samples (item 22); and

- (ii) section 10(1) of the Veterinary Practice Act 2018, it is an offence for a person who is not a registered veterinarian to carry out a restricted act; and
- (c) the practical implications of (1)(b) are that:
  - (i) highly trained ecologists, researchers and other environmental professionals cannot carry out tasks necessary for their work without a veterinarian present;
  - (ii) welfare outcomes are not automatically improved by having a veterinarian present; and
  - (iii) when no vet is available the result is fewer health checks and less data on species;
- (2) recognises that:
  - (a) a 2025 paper in Australian Mammalogy (Bino and Hawke, AM24029):
    - (i) shows trained non-veterinarians have safely anaesthetised more than 500 platypuses over nine years; and
    - (ii) argues for a streamlined accreditation pathway so this proven method can be used more widely;
  - (b) with the record showing that non-vets can administer wildlife anaesthetics safely, the question is whether the rules should enable safe and efficient administration of established methods; and
  - (c) a good accreditation pathway can retain current standards, including species-specific training, proven competency, lawful drug authority and ongoing veterinary and animal ethics oversight; and
- (3) calls on the Government to:
  - (a) consider amending the regulation so that accredited non-veterinarians may perform field anaesthesia on wildlife and the sampling and health procedures it enables, without the on-site attendance of a veterinarian, and in doing so, seek advice from the ACT Veterinary Practitioners Board as to:
    - (i) how ACT regulations currently align with those in other states and territories; and
    - (ii) what accreditation scheme or other pathway would better support appropriately trained and authorised personnel to undertake this work; and
  - (b) report back to the Assembly by the last sitting week of 2026 on whether the regulation will be amended and, if so, when.

It may seem a bit niche, because many of us do not really think about how anaesthesia is administered to wildlife, like platypuses. It is not something that we come across in our day-to-day lives, and many of us in this chamber probably have not come across the issue. But some of us have heard from researchers, and it is something that can be changed.

The core of this motion is about ensuring that our laws keep pace with modern and ethically conscious conservation science, and listening to the experts, while maintaining and, indeed, strengthening our commitment to animal welfare and conservation.

We have some incredible researchers, land managers and conservation experts in the ACT and the surrounding region. Many of them undertake highly technical, hands-on work to better understand and protect a range of native species. We have some incredible wildlife in the ACT and in my electorate of Brindabella.

That work, however, often depends on the careful and humane use of anaesthesia. I am sure I am not the only person in this room to have experienced anaesthesia. It is a temporary and controlled process used to reduce pain and stress in people and animals. It also allows wildlife to be safely handled for essential work, such as health checks, tagging and sampling through sedation or inducing a temporary and controlled loss of consciousness. Importantly, the animal then recovers and returns to the wild, while researchers have managed to gather really important information about that animal.

Here in the ACT, anaesthesia has been used to support research into many different types of wildlife, including research into the habitat use and home ranges of the urban kangaroo populations, enabling scientists to better understand how these animals move through our city landscapes and interact with our ecosystems.

It has been used during the reintroduction of the eastern quolls at Mulligans Flat Woodland Sanctuary, where animals translocated from Tasmania underwent health checks and disease screening to ensure both animal welfare and the protection of the receiving ecosystem. It has been used in the conservation of brush-tailed rock wallabies, including health checks of individuals bred at Tidbinbilla prior to translocation to the Grampians National Park, supporting an important contribution by the ACT to national species recovery efforts. Increasingly, it underpins work to monitor and protect one of our most iconic and sensitive species, and the reason I bring this motion today—the platypus, allowing researchers to assess health, track movement and better understand the pressures facing populations in our waterways here in the ACT.

As a sidenote, and talking about the platypus for a minute, because they are pretty cute—I think everyone would agree on that—I know there has been some discussion since this motion was circulated about what the plural of “platypus” is. It caused a lot of debate in my office as to whether it is “platypuses” or “platypi”. As boring as it sounds, it is “platypuses”, because it comes from Greek, not Latin. But even Microsoft Word was confused and offered both suggestions, while drafting the speech.

I have started calling them “platties”, because it sounds cuter. Some scientific writing just uses “platypus” to describe both the singular and the plural. I have been down this whole rabbit hole about “platypuses” and “platypus” in researching this. But if you are talking about a baby one, you can call them a “nestling” or, my favourite term, “puggle”. Members, don’t be too stressed about how you refer to the platypus here in the chamber.

They are also pretty unique creatures, and one of the most extraordinary animals on earth. According to the Australian Platypus Conservancy website, the initial reaction of British scientist Dr George Shaw, who went on to publish the first description of the platypus by a European scientist in 1799, was that this very unusual-looking animal was an elaborate hoax. He even took a pair of scissors to the preserved specimen, expecting to find that the bill had been attached to the rest of the body with stitches.

In Ngunnawal, the platypus is called the “mulanggang”. They are a significant totem

for the Ngunnawal people, with their presence indicating healthy and abundant landscapes and waterways. I do not think any of us would disagree that their presence is welcome in our waterways, and that we need to do what we can to support their habitat and their future.

Going back to the motion, across all the examples I have shared, anaesthesia is not incidental; it is essential. It allows animals to be handled safely, and it reduces stress and the risk of injury to both the animal and the researcher. It enables the collection of the high-quality data needed to inform conservation decisions. But this work is not undertaken lightly. Researchers operate under strict animal ethics approvals, detailed and standardised protocols and close regulatory oversight. Critically, these procedures are developed and refined in close collaboration with expert wildlife veterinarians.

Here is where the technical stuff comes in. In the ACT, the ethical use of animals in any research project must be consistent with the Australian Code for the Care and Use of Animals for Scientific Purposes, in accordance with the Animal Welfare Act 1992. In the ACT, the Veterinary Practice Regulation 2018 means that administering an anaesthetic agent without the immediate and direct supervision of a veterinarian is a restricted act. It means that carrying out treatments, tests and procedures, such as taking tissue samples, cannot be done unless the animal is sedated and it is a restricted act. It is also an offence for a person who is not a registered veterinarian to carry out a restricted act, which means it is only qualified veterinarians who can carry out the anaesthetising of animals for this research to be undertaken.

In some instances, in states like New South Wales, non-veterinary wildlife researchers will develop the expertise and competency to undertake veterinary procedures safely in the field without direct supervision. This will typically follow a period where safe, standardised approaches are established and practised under field conditions, in close collaboration with a registered veterinary expert.

The practice in New South Wales means that, in a research setting, the use of animals in research at all is assessed and authorised by an animal ethics committee, similar to here. As part of that process, the necessity of using animals in research, as well as the proposed research method, are outlined and approved as being worth any stress or pain that is inflicted on the animal through this process.

The individual researchers are then listed on the project. They also need to be individually assessed for their competency in undertaking these procedures, which considers their experience, qualifications and evidence that they have performed the task safely in the past. It is not uncommon for different people on a project to be approved for only some of the proposed methods. It is a way of ensuring that there are safeguards and protections in place because these people are not veterinarians.

My motion does not get into the nitty-gritty of which particular model should be adopted, if the ACT is going to adopt a model where non-veterinarians are undertaking these processes. But it asks the vet practices board to consider how ACT regulations align with other jurisdictions and make recommendations on a model that could be used here in the ACT so that appropriately trained and authorised personnel can undertake this work.

It is the operational and conservation benefits represented by such a model which are sought to be better utilised through this motion. For example, a recent publication by Associate Professor Gilad Bino and Dr Tahneal Hawke of the University of New South Wales acknowledged the safe and effective anaesthetising of over 500 platypuses by trained and experienced researchers, in the absence of direct supervision by a veterinarian who was physically present. They note:

This approach focuses on developing specific skills relevant to platypus anaesthesia, minimising the time and financial barriers associated with broader veterinary training programs.

Importantly, this is not about lowering standards; it is about defining and enforcing them more clearly through appropriate competency-based accreditation or approval pathways. The study proposes:

Establishing such accreditation pathways would streamline Animal Ethics Committee approvals by providing clear and consistent criteria for non-veterinarian qualifications ... enhancing the accessibility and scalability of field-based research.

This is a model grounded in both science and welfare. It recognises that veterinarian expertise remains essential, particularly in the design of protocols, training and oversight. But it also recognises the practical realities of field-based research. As the authors state:

We do not advocate for the complete removal of veterinary involvement, but rather for reducing reliance on continuous veterinary oversight during fieldwork ... The practical realities of field-based research often render on-site veterinarian supervision unfeasible.

I want to make it clear that, like the authors of the study I have just quoted, in no way am I advocating for the complete removal of veterinary involvement, but for the necessary changes to upskill highly trained ecologists, researchers and environmental professionals to carry out their work without a vet being present. I acknowledge the concerns raised by the RSPCA and others, and agree that consultation is needed, as are safeguards. I know that this will be flagged in a later speech.

Many in this chamber are already aware that, if you take a pet to the vet, there is a vet nurse or technician who can administer some medications and vaccinations, because they have been deemed skilled at that and have undergone the training. Vets then get to see more patients and our pets get the treatment services that they need more efficiently. Why should we deny upskilling and enabling highly skilled scientists to be able to administer the anaesthesia to carry out the work they are already trained to carry out while in the wild?

The consequences of not making these changes are real. Fewer animals can be monitored, fewer health checks are undertaken, less data is collected and, ultimately, there are weaker conservation outcomes. Conversely, enabling appropriate training and accredited practitioners to undertake these procedures mean improved animal welfare outcomes, increasing the feasibility of research and strengthening our evidence base for conservation decisions.

This motion does not abandon safeguards for our wildlife—quite the opposite. It calls on the government to consider how our regulations could support consistency between ACT regulations and those in New South Wales, support a clear and robust accreditation pathway for practitioners, retain strong veterinary involvement and oversight, and ensure ongoing scrutiny through animal ethics committees and regulatory bodies. It calls for advice from the ACT Veterinary Practitioners Board, including how our framework compares to other jurisdictions, and it calls for the government to report back on whether reform is needed and how it could be implemented.

Ultimately, it is about balance. It is about ensuring that high standards of animal welfare are upheld, expert knowledge is recognised and utilised, and our regulatory system enables, rather than unintentionally constrains, best practice conservation science. Empowering trained ecologists, our researchers, to safely perform these procedures does not diminish welfare; it enhances it, and it allows us to better protect the extraordinary wildlife that define the ACT.

I want to thank Associate Professor Gilad Bino for his advocacy and engagement with this issue and for wanting to see an outcome where more platypuses can be studied in the wild, leading to better outcomes for the platypus and their environment. I want to thank Ms Clay for her positive engagement on this motion and our shared love of supporting the platypus in our community. I understand that this motion has support in the chamber. I look forward to everyone's contribution. I do not want to pre-empt the debate, so I will leave anything further to my closing remarks. I commend the motion to the Assembly.

**MR CAIN** (Ginninderra) (3.21): I want to thank Ms Tough for moving this motion. The Canberra Liberals will be supporting it. Part of my observation of the motion itself is to say: who would have thought that this could not happen? I realise that sometimes legislation or a regulation are put in place for good reasons. Obviously, we want our wildlife cared for by people who are trained experts, and the safe course in this type of case usually is to say, "They have to be a vet."

Some feedback has been provided that—and I am trusting Ms Tough on this—in the incidents where care could be given but it is prevented by the law, shouldn't we find a way to make that happen, where the care is informed, genuine and immediate? That does seem to be the purpose of this motion.

I will not get too oppositional about this. Obviously, it has been sitting there for quite a while; maybe the fresh eyes of a backbencher coming into the chamber have made a contribution here. It does beg the question: what else that is rather obvious could be administered better and is still waiting out there to be improved?

I put myself out there to the community: if you notice anything at all in our environment space, in the care of our animals, and in the management of domestic, wildlife and farmed animals, in my new shadow portfolio of city services, I am very happy to take ideas from our community.

I note the "calls on". Given that this is a motion from a Labor backbencher, with the

calls for the government to consider, maybe things will happen pretty quickly. There does seem to be a strong case for support—not just to consider, but actually to fix this. With reporting back by the last sitting week of this year, what about before then? I might have had an amendment to say, “How about you do it by then, at the very latest, but you can do it earlier.”

I do have a hopeful suspicion that, given the side of the chamber that this motion has come from, we might see some prompt action on this regulatory lacuna that can be easily closed, by the look of it, for the benefit of our wildlife who need that immediate care.

I am happy to have further conversations with Ms Tough on this: is it just for the benefit of the platypus, having regard to our wildlife? One could imagine scenarios where this kind of care would benefit other species of our native wildlife. I do not think “platypus” is mentioned in the motion itself; is that right?

**Ms Tough:** I think it is once.

**MR CAIN:** Just once. Yes, it is: “platypuses”. That is a controversy of its own, of course. I do not know how you can do consultation on what is the right term—“platypi” or “platypuses”. Maybe the rangers could issue a call to a group and see which one they respond to most easily! That is a comical scenario that is playing out in my mind. As members know, I will probably get some crazy ideas, while running through this.

I want to thank Ms Tough for the motion. The Canberra Liberals will be supporting it. I do not think I need to labour the point that the care of our wildlife is not something that is strongly ideologically or politically driven. We love our native fauna. On a broader front, we love all of our animals—domestic, farmed and wild—being cared for appropriately and humanely.

**MS CLAY (Ginninderra) (3.25):** I want to thank Ms Tough for bringing forward today’s motion. We also had a bit of a chat in our office about the appropriate collective noun, and it is an “adorer of platypussies”, just to set the record straight on that! This is a really worthwhile topic. I am glad that Ms Tough has brought this forward today. We did a bit of a check around, with some of our friends and colleagues in the wildlife area, and this is a really valuable topic to look at.

This is a really great area in which to look at regulatory reform, and I think government will do some good and careful work here. This could improve animal welfare standards very helpfully. It could be particularly helpful for macropods and wombats, and I think it is being really positively viewed.

There are some concerns. Like all regulatory work, it needs to be done carefully. It would be important to make sure that the RSPCA and other organisations are consulted on any proposed law changes and on the reporting back element of this. There is a reason that we have certain reserved powers for vets at the moment. They are carefully regulated. I think it is a great idea for us to look at whether the responsibility for anaesthetisation can and should be given to others, but there will need to be checks and balances on that, if that is expanded.

We have different requirements and limitations here in the ACT. Some states have really broad geographical areas, so it is overwhelmingly necessary to have lots of people authorised to do certain things. Whether or not we have the same constraints here, I am not sure, so we would need to make sure that we are looking at this, importantly, in a local ACT context, and make sure that we have done that careful regulatory checking.

Overall, this is a great issue to bring forward. We look forward to seeing the results of the report and to seeing what stakeholder consultation has been done in that report. If there are regulatory reforms that flow from that, we would love to see those in the future. Thank you for bringing it along. Thank you for speaking out for our wildlife. We look forward to seeing these improvements coming through.

**MR WERNER-GIBBINGS** (Brindabella) (3.28): I rise to speak in support of my Brindabella Labor colleague Ms Tough and her motion before the Assembly, which calls for sensible, practical and achievable improvements to how we interact with wildlife in the ACT. I hope that I was the only member here who incorrectly read the motion's initial draft as a call to make it easier to put platypuses down. "Courageous, Ms Tough," I thought, "but I'll support you—thick and thin." However, I am much happier speaking about this common-sense approach to supporting ACT wildlife health and enabling greater data collection.

The fact that the motion is backed by the Australian Mammal Society's rigorous and peer-reviewed data is extremely helpful and very persuasive. That data has looked at and drawn conclusions from the real-world application of trained non-veterinarian administrations of anaesthetic agents. As it stands in the ACT, a trained ecologist—someone who has spent years learning exactly how to handle and assess our native species safely in the field—cannot complete their job without a veterinarian physically standing beside them.

Ms Tough has now put the evidence in front of us that trained non-veterinarian administration of anaesthesia can be safely performed, and should be, and that such training is not difficult to provide to those working in the field. I am not at all surprised to see such a practical approach to improving support for our wildlife come from a fellow Brindabellian. Indeed, our bush electorate—1,600 square kilometres—is mostly national parks, reserves or other natural spaces.

Mr Assistant Speaker, if you have been to the Tidbinbilla Nature Reserve, that is the home of platypuses in the ACT. I have seen platypuses in two places in my life—one in Lake Cethana, in Tasmania, and about five or six on multiple occasions in Tidbinbilla. It is a wonderful place to go and see a very rare and extraordinary Australian native animal—Australia's equal favourite monotreme.

For many people who live in Brindabella, our national parks, our nature, is only a short drive, a leisurely bike ride or a long but manageable hike from their front doors, and it is a hike to bushland chock-a-block with wildlife. I think that many people choose to live in Brindabella because nature and its wildlife are so intrinsic to our community's identity.

I, and the people of Brindabella, thank Ms Tough for this motion, and I commend it 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) (3.31): I thank Ms Tough for bringing forward this motion and for the thoughtful and considered way that she has approached it. We are pleased to support it today.

As has been stressed by all members in this chamber who have spoken, the regulatory question at the heart of this motion is a genuine one. I can assure you, Mr Assistant Speaker, that we are not putting platypuses down. There is a distinction between anaesthesia and euthanasia, but it is an important distinction to make.

The current requirement for immediate and direct onsite supervision does seem, on the face of it, to be restrictive. The example that Ms Tough has used with platypuses highlights this. With remote riparian work, the circumstances in which platypuses make themselves available to researchers can be limited. I think that makes the point quite clearly.

Also, the ACT is small, but it does not mean we do not have plenty of remote areas. We have a lot. That was very clear, even in the most recent bushfire season. Where some of those fires had taken off, we needed to undertake some pretty extraordinary measures to get our crews into the remote areas of Namadgi. It is not hard to think about some areas which are difficult to access, and, precisely because we are a small jurisdiction, we do not necessarily have economies of scale, and nor do we have a never-ending pool of veterinarians, either. I think the practical barriers in the ACT are, if anything, more acute than in larger jurisdictions.

The evidence that Ms Tough has been able to present, including Associate Professor Bino's published record of over 500 safe procedures, helpfully demonstrates that competency, not physical co-presence, is the appropriate standard in the right circumstances. That is what I want to emphasise here, taking Ms Clay's points and the feedback from the RSPCA seriously.

This is a motion that is framing a question about the framework for accredited non-veterinarians undertaking field anaesthesia. This is not about allowing anyone to administer wildlife anaesthetics in the field. It is about defining conditions, training, competency, oversight, approvals and accountability under which the right people can do it. That distinction matters, and that is the appropriate rigour that we will apply to progressing this motion.

Establishing that right accreditation pathway for the greatest range of species is something that I am very keen to do, but it is something that we want to do properly and not rush it. By the same token, it may well be that there are circumstances where we are able more quickly to prescribe persons as exempted persons under section 10(3)(c) of the act, which is the regulation-making power that would enable these circumstances.

We will see what we can do as quickly as possible, noting Mr Cain's contribution before, and what we are able to achieve by December, when we will provide a comprehensive response on what we have been able to do. We will keep interested

members across anything that we are able to do or introduce in the meantime, and set out if and whether we are able to apply the intent of this motion more broadly.

I look forward to progressing this work on behalf of platypuses, their researchers, carers and all other persons who meaningfully have a reason to anaesthetise them, together with any other species. I commend the motion to the chamber.

**MS TOUGH** (Brindabella) (3.36), in reply: I want to thank everyone in the chamber for their support today. Firstly, I want to acknowledge the concerns raised by Ms Clay from her consultation with the RSPCA. I appreciate that, after seeing this motion, Ms Clay undertook her own consultation as well, to get a broad understanding of the motion and the ideas behind it. I thank Ms Clay for reaching out to Wombat Rescue and the RSPCA. I completely agree, and the minister agrees as well, that understanding the risks to regulatory changes is vital before any changes are made. I would expect nothing less than proper engagement and consultation with all stakeholders before any changes are considered. I really appreciate the minister taking these changes seriously.

I want to thank Mr Cain for his engagement in and support of this motion. I agree that it seems like something that could be quite simple to do, once the reviews have taken place and once proper consultation happens. It does seem like something that should be happening. I am not a vet, though, so I want to make sure that the proper people consider it. While I focused on the platypus in my speech, there are examples where anaesthesia is used on many other wildlife. I do welcome the investigation into how these changes could help many different animals across our community, in Tidbinbilla and in Namadgi.

Of course, an earlier date for reporting back would be great, but I want to make sure that there is consultation and a proper understanding of any regulatory changes before anything is considered, and that we do not have a report back halfway through things happening. Obviously, an earlier date for reporting back would be welcome. Mr Werner-Gibbings, thank you for your contribution. It is not to out my staff, but you are not the only person to read my motion and think it said “euthanasia”, not “anaesthesia”. In defence of my staff, it was pretty late at night when they read that, so I can understand the difference. I am glad that we have been able to clear this up, and I appreciate your support.

I thank the minister for her support and agreement that this is something that should be explored, and that it might be something that could be explored in stages, having regard to helping different animals—hopefully, eventually, the platypus. Brindabella has wild platypus. Anyone can get involved in Platypus Watch later in the year, looking at the “platties” and the “ratties”. Any volunteer can get involved in counting them in our community.

Brindabella is also the home of the platypus population at Tidbinbilla, which Mr Werner-Gibbings touched on. If you have never seen a platypus in person, I really recommend that you go and check them out, because they are adorable. They are unique. It is really important that we look at what laws and regulations we have, when it comes to animal conservation, to make it easier for us to do the research on conserving our animals. Our platypus and many other animals will benefit if these regulatory changes can happen. I commend my motion to the chamber.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

## **Order of the day—postponement**

*Ordered that notice No. 2, private member's business, be postponed until a later hour.*

## **Papers**

### **Motion to take note of papers**

Motion (by **Mr Assistant Speaker Werner-Gibbins**) agreed to:

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

*(Quorum formed.)*

## **Financial Management and Government Procurement Legislative Compliance—Select Committee Report**

**MS CARRICK** (Murrumbidgee) (3.44): Pursuant to order, I present the following report:

Financial Management and Government Procurement Legislative Compliance—Select Committee—Report—Inquiry into Financial Management and Government Procurement Legislative Compliance, dated 5 June 2026, including additional comments (Mr Werner Gibbins), together with the relevant minutes of proceedings.

I move:

That the report be noted.

This is the first and final report of the Select Committee on Financial Management and Government Procurement Legislative Compliance for the Eleventh Assembly. The Assembly established the committee on 26 February 2026. The committee received 10 submissions and held two public hearings. The committee examined compliance with two pieces of legislation: the Financial Management Act 1996, where the use of, and reporting on, appropriation adjustment mechanisms was a focus area; and the Government Procurement Act 2001, with a focus on the application of the Secure Local Jobs Code.

While the committee did not draw conclusions about specific instances of breaches of these acts, the evidence received by the committee suggested a general drift towards administrative convenience in how these acts have been interpreted over the years. The seven findings and 12 recommendations suggest areas for focus and review to enhance transparency and confidence in the application of these acts.

On behalf of the committee, I would like to thank all who contributed to this inquiry,

including the Treasurer, the Minister for Finance, directorate officials, the ACT Auditor-General and witnesses who appeared before the committee. I thank the other members who participated in this inquiry—our deputy chair, Mr Braddock, Mrs Morris and Mr Werner-Gibbins. I commend the report to the Assembly.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

**MS CARRICK** (Murrumbidgee) (3.46), by leave: I would now like to speak as an Independent member. This report goes to the heart of public trust in how government manages and reports public money. The Financial Management Act 1996 is clear. It requires full, accurate and timely disclosure of financial information, including that section 16B authorisations be attached to the next financial statement presented to the Assembly. The current practice does not meet that intent. Section 16B of the act authorises the minister to approve unspent funds in one financial year to be spent in the next financial year. This is called a rollover.

While the government argues that 16B instruments can be attached to quarterly reports for the same period, in practice, this delays the visibility of significant decisions and undermines timely scrutiny. The Assembly is not receiving a complete or timely picture of government expenditure.

In recent years, total additional appropriations have been substantial—\$489 million in 2022-23, \$691 million in 2023-24 and \$606 million in 2024-25. These figures include large 16B rollovers. The gross amount of rollovers are: \$171 million across 256 rollovers in 2023-24; and \$280 million across 263 rollovers in 2024-25. Yet so far, in 2025-26, only one rollover, for \$150,000, has been reported. Section 16B rollovers are offset by funds brought forward, so the net movements are still significant, at over \$110 million each year.

These are significant sums, yet they are not disclosed before key scrutiny points like the February budget review. Instead, they appear months later, sometimes even after the financial year that the funds are being rolled into has ended. For example, \$100 million of rollovers from 2023-24 to 2024-25 were approved on 10 April 2025, but were not reported to the Assembly until September 2025, after the money had already been spent. This means the Assembly is being asked to scrutinise expenditure decisions after the fact. It also raises a fundamental question. Why have we seen additional appropriations of up to \$691 million in recent years, but only \$150,000 has been reported so far this year?

Compounding this issue, key information is fragmented across multiple reports. Rather than being presented in a single accessible format, members are left to piece together the true financial position. This does not meet the act's requirement for full, accurate and timely disclosure. This is not an isolated issue; it is a systemic problem with the timing, structure and presentation of financial reporting, one that has weakened parliamentary oversight. Importantly, the committee does not suggest deliberate wrongdoing; rather, this reflects a gradual shift from the intent of the legislation.

Concerns about transparency also extend beyond appropriations. As Mr Saul Eslake has noted, there are issues with the accuracy of revenue and expense forecasts. Similar challenges exist in procurement, where fragmented information makes it difficult to

assess total project costs and value for money. Put simply, if you cannot see the full cost of a project, you cannot properly assess value or outcomes.

With hundreds of rollovers in recent years, it is time to review whether the current reporting framework is delivering the transparency needed for both parliamentary scrutiny and effective financial management. A clearer system, potentially including program reporting, should be considered.

Given the lack of full, accurate and timely disclosure identified in this report, I call on the government to bring forward its review of the Financial Management Act to ensure its intent is clearly upheld in law. I would like to thank Mr Cocks for identifying these issues and ensuring that there was an inquiry into them.

**MR COCKS** (Murrumbidgee) (3.51), by leave: I want to take a moment to thank the committee and thank Ms Carrick for the herculean methods in examining the issue. The comments from Ms Carrick really highlight the spectacular scale of the government's hidden rollover practices. Those numbers are staggering. The idea that the government could be hiding effectively hundreds of millions of dollars for months at a time, during periods when the Assembly ought to have the opportunity to not only scrutinise but also consider whether an additional appropriation is an appropriate step, is an astoundingly opaque practice that—as it sounds like the committee has considered—is not consistent with what the Financial Management Act was at least intended to achieve. I look forward to reading the report in full, but, clearly, it is not consistent with the text within the Financial Management Act. It is absolutely astounding if the government think that they can get away with it. It really highlights, as Ms Carrick has pointed out, systemic failure and systemic problems.

It is genuinely important that budgeting is honest. If you do not have honest budgeting and honest forecasts of where the government is going over not only the current year but also forward years, and if you do not have an honest starting point for the budget year that the Assembly considers today, then how is any scrutiny meant to be effective? How is any consideration of the government's agenda supposed to be based in fact, when already, by the time the Assembly is looking at the numbers, it has shifted?

I note that the Treasurer was today extremely reluctant to provide any sort of information in response to Ms Carrick's questions about the use of 16B rollovers. There is, as Ms Carrick mentioned, one on the record so far. How many more have been signed in the interim? How many more are there? That is the question. From the time that the last reporting period ended until today, how many more have been signed? That would materially change the basis upon which we are considering the budget today.

It is utterly appalling, from my perspective, that the government is doing this now when it sounds like it has been a systemic issue that has been increasingly used over multiple years. It sounds like the committee has not been able to determine that what the government is doing is, in fact, within its legal ability. I very much look forward to reading the full report and any future steps that come from it.

## **Administration and Procedure—Standing Committee**

**MS CASTLEY** (Yerrabi) (3.54): I move:

That the resolution of the Assembly of 3 December 2024, as amended on 4 February 2025, 26 June 2025, 4 December 2025 and 26 March 2026, that established general purpose standing committees, be amended to insert “Ms Castley,” after “Ms Carrick” in paragraph (13).

This motion simply seeks to add me to the Standing Committee on Administration and Procedure in a non-voting capacity. This change would ensure consistency with the other two members of the crossbench.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

## **North Canberra Hospital—order to table documents**

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

That, in accordance with standing order 213A, the Assembly orders the Government to provide the Assembly with documents regarding:

- (1) an updated whole-of-project cost estimate for the North Canberra Hospital redevelopment, including the costs associated with returning the site to government control;
- (2) a breakdown of expenditure by project stage, including planning, enabling works, construction and associated infrastructure;
- (3) details of any changes to the project scope since the original concept planning and business case work;
- (4) updated project delivery schedule, including milestones and anticipated completion dates;
- (5) a summary of major project risks and mitigation strategies;
- (6) information as to the anticipated borrowing and financial arrangements associated with the project; and
- (7) evidence and information relating to the planned approach for peak body, union and consumer representative consultation during the planning and construction phase.

This motion is a straightforward call for transparency and accountability on one of the largest infrastructure projects undertaken by the ACT government: the north-side hospital redevelopment. It is expected to cost taxpayers billions of dollars and will shape healthcare delivery in Canberra for generations, yet, despite the significance of this project, there remains considerable uncertainty about its final cost, delivery timetable, financing arrangements and overall scope.

Recent reporting has indicated substantial increases in the estimated cost of the project compared with earlier expectations. At the same time, questions remain about the impact of inflation and construction market pressures and whether changes have been made to the project’s original design and service assumptions. The community deserves a clear and updated picture of where the project stands today, not where it stood several years ago when the original planning work was undertaken.

This motion does not seek to delay the project, nor does it seek to undermine the need for modern hospital infrastructure in Canberra's north; it seeks to ensure that members of this Assembly, healthcare workers, patients and taxpayers have access to the information necessary to understand the project's progress, risks and financial implications. Transparency builds confidence; secrecy and uncertainty do not.

Importantly, the motion also seeks information about consultation arrangements during the planning and construction phases. Large health infrastructure projects affect clinicians, healthcare workers, consumers, unions and peak bodies alike. Their experience and expertise are critical to ensuring the finished facility meets the needs of patients and staff. The Assembly should be satisfied that meaningful consultation is occurring and that lessons learned from previous major projects have been incorporated into the redevelopment process.

Ultimately, this motion asks the government to provide the Assembly with the facts, the updated costs, the revised timeline, the project's risks, the financing arrangements and the consultation framework. Given the scale of public investment involved, these are not unreasonable requests. They are the minimum level of transparency that the ACT community should expect from its government. If the government remains confident in the management of this project, it should have no difficulty in providing the Assembly with this information and supporting this motion. I commend the motion to the Assembly.

**MS CLAY** (Ginninderra) (3.58): The Greens will be happy to support Mr Parton's motion today, and I thank him for bringing it forward. Transparency and accountability on this project are really useful.

I move:

Add:

- “(8) all population modelling or projections used to calculate the appropriate number of beds and consultation rooms in the new northside birth centre;
- (9) cost estimates provided to Government by project managers, consultants or design and build firms to construct each different birth centre option from the Feasibility study (Freestanding, Stand Alone and Alongside);
- (10) cost estimates for constructing each birth centre location considered (1, 2, 3, 4, 5 and A, B, C referenced in 21 Jan 2026 powerpoint for briefing of Ms Clay MLA);
- (11) any cost estimates for increased impact on the hospital and health care system by failing to meet the continuity of care targets in Maternity in Focus, and failing to provide birth options outside a hospital, if these were not considered, clear advice that they were not considered;
- (12) the Government's understanding of what co-design entails, what has the co-design process looked like thus far and what consumers and other stakeholders have been involved in the co-design process (if any);
- (13) which stakeholders were engaged with regarding to the new northside birth centre, when they were engaged with (including dates) and summaries of what their feedback was;

- (14) when, how, and who made the final decision to have a model that only contains in-hospital birth centre beds, reasoning for that decision, and why the capacity is the same as the existing level of six birth suite beds and two birth centre beds;
- (15) summary documents of all feedback received from the list of stakeholders engaged in the project at Appendix A of the Options for the Northside Birth Centre Feasibility study report 16 October 2024;
- (16) any projections on construction of any stand alone or freestanding birth centre, including project delivery, milestones, anticipated completion dates and major project risks and mitigation strategies;
- (17) any federal infrastructure grants or other funding applied for any aspect of the new northside hospital or new northside birth centre and when applications or representations were made;
- (18) plans (including timelines) for attracting healthcare professionals (including doctors, nurses and midwives) to come and work at the new Northside Hospital and new northside birth centre.”.

I have moved some amendments that relate to one aspect of the hospital: the freestanding birth centre. This is an issue that has been of concern to the Greens for some time. I thank Mr Parton, the health minister, Mr Emerson, Ms Carrick and Ms Castley for engaging on this issue. I have put up some amendments. They are fairly lengthy. I understand the government will do the best they can to fulfil this. If documents do not exist, that is okay. The response will be: “These documents do not exist.” Some of them will exist and some of them will not. We are quite keen to get this information. We have asked a lot of questions in question time and on notice, we have lodged an FOI, and we have spoken to people involved in the project, and we are still concerned about how this is rolling out.

In 2023, I tabled petitions with over 3,000 signatures calling for a freestanding birth centre for Canberra. That same day, the Assembly passed my motion unanimously. It called for a feasibility study to establish a co-designed, midwife-led freestanding birth centre located alongside or fully separate to the new north-side hospital. The feasibility study happened and it made these recommendations: pursue a standalone birth centre for the north-side hospital; and design and construct the new birth centre with a strong emphasis on cultural safety, trauma-informed care and person-centred principles.

I was surprised last week at the Labor government’s announcement that the new north-side hospital would include birthing facilities of six birth suite beds and two birth centre beds. That is what the current hospital has. It has six birth suite beds and two birth centre beds. It is not new. It looks a lot like the status quo. I understand the health minister will have a different take on what the offering is, but the current North Canberra Hospital has six birth suite beds and two birth centre beds inside the hospital. They are usually full. There is huge demand for continuity of care and for birth centre beds, which was one of the reasons for that motion. We need more of them. And the birth centre does not look like it will be standalone or freestanding but inside the hospital. It looks a lot like a ward. I understand there is a separate door.

We have had a briefing and we have had conversation. I have spoken to the people who are involved. It is looking an awful lot like what we already have. It looks like it contradicts the recommendations in the feasibility report and it contradicts what the

minister said in her speech during the 2023 motion, where she said:

Through our work on the north side hospital and north side health services design, we have a real opportunity to conduct early design and feasibility for a co-designed, midwife-led, freestanding or alongside birth centre. That really means it is freestanding, outside of the hospital setting, but on the same campus as the hospital itself.

The offering also looks like it contradicts what the minister assured me in estimates last year when I asked a question. I said, “It sounds like the government has committed to that standalone birth centre,” and the health minister said, “Yes.”

A bit of a story is told in the ACT about what happens in government consultations. People often say they feel like the government have made all of the decisions and then they go to the consultation and ask people what colour they want the paint to be. I think this is often unfair. There is often really good and detailed conversation, but I am concerned that we are seeing this. I saw on the Chief Minister’s socials that the new birth centre is labelled as “co-designed”. “Co-design” is not a buzzword. “Co-design” is not the same as “consultation”. “Co-design” is a specific design methodology that means you work with the end users to design something that addresses the problems they are facing as they see it. In co-design, there are people on the facilitating team from the end-user community.

One of the important steps is to check in constantly and ask, “Is this solving the problem that our end users are facing?” and, if you discover the solution or the outcome you are working towards does not solve that problem or it looks like a bandaid, you go back to the drawing board and you address that before you move on. Without that process, it is collaboration or consultation. In this instance, co-designing the interior furnishing from something that has already been decided is not solving the problem that was voiced by the end users: the consumers, the health workforce, women and birthing people.

The announcement was made on Tuesday last week. Consumers were brought in to talk with iCBR the Friday before—a business day before the announcement. I have heard a lot of stories from constituents who have reached out to me about how they felt the discussions that they wanted to have were shut down. They felt that the location and the infrastructure were already decided. They felt that they were there to just input into the aesthetics. That is not what the community asked for. That is what we already have at the moment.

Here is feedback from a few people who have asked me to read this into the *Hansard*. Karel Williams, the brilliant First Nations midwife currently finalising her PhD on exploring Birthing with Country models of care as restorative practice, was initially involved in the so-called consultation. Karel has subsequently asked that the government stop referring to the birth centre as incorporating the principles of Birthing with Country, because, by definition, it is not a Birthing with Country model. It is so far from what was requested in the petition that Karel described it as insulting. It is a mainstream model that still needs to incorporate the principle of culturally safe spaces. It is not Birthing with Country. Here are comments from some participants who want to remain anonymous. One said:

I honestly feel gaslit by the ACT Government on this outcome—it’s a replacement

of existing facilities. Even the use of language is a trick—we are now referring to a birth centre INSIDE the hospital as a “standalone” birth centre.

Another said:

They gave no explanation for population projections or how they came to the conclusion that they only need two rooms, no explanation of why they chose that site, no explanation of the parameters they are working amongst. They shut down group discussion, broke us up into small groups and asked us the same aesthetics based questions for two hours.

That is not co-design. I am actually worried if that is consultation. It looks like box-ticking to the people who have been deeply engaged, and some of these people have been on this campaign for 10, 20 or 30 years. The participants engaged with the consultation thought they would be able to share their views on the model of care. They felt that the model of care was already determined and the consultation was about the colour of the paint. I have also heard reports that there were some absences. It did not look like there were multicultural groups, LGBTQIA+ groups, disability groups or perinatal wellbeing groups. I hope they are involved at other stages. I hope that they have not been left out altogether.

I put this in the context of one of the problems with this issue. Canberra’s C-section rate is now the highest in the country. Design documents I obtained under FOI assume that we do not need more than two birth centre beds beyond 2041. This design work is not accounting for population growth. It is not accounting for the Maternity in Focus commitment to expand continuity of care. It is not accounting for the fact that we are moving in the wrong direction in terms of surgical intervention on birth. It is not accounting for the fact that the rate of midwifery continuity of care has actually fallen. We have gone backwards from 23.4 per cent to 20 per cent in the last two years, despite the fact that our target is 50 per cent by 2028.

All these things are moving in the wrong direction, and I cannot see, at this immense opportunity in time, how this proposal is going to take us in the right direction. I am honestly not sure how the government are going to deliver on their Midwifery in Focus commitments of 50 per cent continuity of care by 2028. I cannot see the political will to invest in infrastructure that is improving our birthing outcomes and our birthing choices for women and birthing people. I am genuinely uncertain as to how the Labor government think that this is a freestanding, separate or alongside facility. It does not look like any of the facilities that were in discussion and committed to prior to the discussions. And this is not just a personal view; this is also the view of a lot of people who have been involved in the most recent discussions.

I am hoping there is still time and space to rethink this and to make some commitments about what Canberra will have in future, because, otherwise, I do not understand how the Labor government can say that they are committed to Maternity in Focus and the commitment to a freestanding or alongside birth centre.

**MS STEPHEN-SMITH** (Kurrajong—Minister for Health, Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Finance and Minister for the Public Service) (4.07): I will speak to Ms Clay’s amendment, but I will start by thanking the Leader of the Opposition for bringing forward this motion. I note that a substantial volume of documentation has

been produced across multiple planning stages that fall within the scope of the motion. That material will span a range of classifications and timeframes, so reviewing all of that documentation that goes to the questions that Mr Parton has effectively asked in his motion will be a substantial effort. My office raised with Mr Parton's office that there seemed to be a range of questions that he would like answered and that perhaps it would have been better to put some questions on notice to get answers to the questions he wants answered, rather than asking the public service to produce thousands of pages of documents that tangentially link to the issues or may contain two sentences or paragraphs that relate to the issues in his motion.

However, we are where we are. We are not going to oppose this motion. In fact, it is absolutely the case that we have had a long record of transparency and providing information to the community—on this project but also on other projects, including the Canberra Hospital expansion, which is a project that was delivered on budget and pretty much on time and is now doing an outstanding job in supporting our staff, patients and their families and carers.

As the Assembly would be aware, this project is currently in the very early contractor involvement phase, with the transition to the early contractor involvement phase expected within the next few months. It may be that some documents may remain commercial-in-confidence or sensitive for contract negotiation purposes until the early contractor involvement stage has been finalised, but I am not going to second-guess the public servants in relation to that.

We, of course, have not yet entered into the main works lump-sum contract, which is a critical factor in how the information must be handled as well. Premature release of sensitive information at this stage could potentially compromise competitive tension and value-for-money outcomes in the forthcoming procurement phases. It is important to recognise that, while Multiplex is our very early contractor involvement partner, there are off-ramps for both Multiplex and us if we do not believe that we are getting value for money. It may be that this information is sensitive in that context. A number of the document categories will, of course, require redaction or being withheld in total to mitigate these commercial and procurement risks, including some of the detailed cost breakdowns and pricing assumptions, risk registers and risk allocation strategies, forecast delivery schedules, program assumptions and key milestones.

*Mr Parton interjecting—*

**MS STEPHEN-SMITH:** Mr Parton is smiling as if I am somehow trying to hide something by saying this. I am being transparent about it because these things are subject to commercial negotiation when you are entering into a contract for a \$1.34 billion commitment over the next seven years to deliver a major hospital.

**Mr Parton:** I am actually smiling at Ed's socks.

**MS STEPHEN-SMITH:** This is not a small thing. These contract negotiations are lengthy and detailed. It is absolutely critical that our officials are empowered to get the best deal for ACT taxpayers when they are undertaking these negotiations. If releasing this information compromises their ability to get the best deal for ACT taxpayers, I think that is a pretty legitimate reason for withholding this information until the contract

is finalised.

Given the scope of documents to be provided and analysed, which include a level of cross-portfolio consideration as well, I will subsequently move an amendment—which I understand will be supported—to delay the delivery date for this, but I will speak to that very briefly later.

As indicated, the 2026-27 budget will deliver a carefully-staged investment of \$1.34 billion over the next seven years, prioritising this critical health infrastructure while maintaining a responsible approach to the territory's finances. That will bring the government's total commitment to the new north-side hospital to around \$1½ billion over a decade. That does not include the cost of the acquisition of Calvary Public Hospital Bruce, but that cost is already public. The entirety of that cost is already public and has been the subject of debate in this place. So you can add things together and get a number. In relation to that process, the work that we did prior to the acquisition very clearly indicated that the efficiencies that we would gain by having a single public hospital network provider would far outweigh the likely cost of the acquisition, and that has certainly held in terms of the final cost of the acquisition.

There has been extensive consultation with key stakeholders, including clinicians, consumer advocates and community organisations, both early and in terms of ongoing active involvement in shaping the design and planning of the new north-side hospital to date. Further detailed design work is still to be undertaken, with engagement continuing as the design evolves.

I guess that brings me to Ms Clay's amendment, which we will also not oppose. But I did indicate to Ms Clay that I felt it was a pretty bad-faith proposition for her to bring this type of amendment to this type of motion to the Assembly. We have been absolutely transparent and open in briefing both Ms Clay and advocates on multiple occasions. We have just held a four-hour roundtable with stakeholders. We do not have the report back from that roundtable yet, and I have been clear with her that no final decisions have been made. There were, previously in those conversations, two options on the table in terms of location that were practical on a brownfield hospital build.

One of the things that the feasibility study clearly found was that a standalone birth centre on a hospital site needed to be close enough to the hospital building that transfer could occur either by walking, wheelchair or in a bed. All of the other potential locations that Ms Clay has identified in her motion that are not the two shortlisted locations would not enable that transfer to occur. They would require an ambulance to pick up somebody from the birth centre and take them, via the emergency department, into the hospital building on the same site. That is because we are building on a brownfield site. It is not because we do not want to build a standalone birth centre of the exact type that was proposed; it is because we cannot do it in the context of a brownfield development. So we are compromising, but this is one of the points about co-design.

As I said in my response to questions in question time—and I will go to a definition from the Australian Commission on Safety and Quality in Health Care—co-design is when consumers and health professionals come together to build a shared understanding of an issue and work together to create solutions. Co-design involves people who have dealt with the issue so solutions created are underpinned by real

experiences. Co-design does not mean one party gets to dictate an outcome that is completely and utterly impractical for every other party. It is about bringing people together and developing a shared understanding. That is what we have been committed to and that is what we have been doing.

I was really sorry to hear about some of the experiences that Ms Clay conveyed that people had expressed to her from the roundtable. I genuinely was. I was also sorry that she did not contact me directly—she has my number; she has my email address—to let me know that that was what stakeholders had fed back to her from the roundtable. I had very different feedback from the roundtable. I heard that it was robust, that people had expressed a wide range of views, and that some people were very disappointed about the options that were on the table, but it was an opportunity to explain some of the physical constraints that we are facing in doing a brownfield build.

One of the things that I have talked about with Ms Clay and other stakeholders is whether we do a two-stage process, where we recognise that the birth centre we include in stage 1 of the north-side hospital build is not ideal, but it is as good as we can do in the context of a separate entrance, a back door, to a hospital building. As I previously said, I have been to Townsville—after the motion; after we agreed. One of the things I deliberately visited was Townsville University Hospital’s birth centre, because I was told that this is a really excellent model. It is joined to the hospital with a back door. It has a separate entrance to a home-like space that is joined to the hospital by a back door. That is what I was told, by advocates in this place, I should look at as an example. Now I am being told that we are operating in bad faith, when we have been absolutely transparent about our objectives and about the constraints that we face. As I have said multiple times, one option is to do stage 1 and then, when we have replaced a bunch of the existing buildings with the new stage 1 build, build a fully freestanding birth centre on the north-side hospital campus as part of stage 2, and re-use the part of the building that delivers the initial birth centre.

I have also said I have questioned whether two rooms are enough. We heard that feedback at the roundtable. The listening report has not even been done yet, but we heard that feedback at the roundtable. And we have not made a final decision, as Ms Clay said in her motion. There has been no final decision. I cannot be more crystal-clear on that.

I have also pointed out to Ms Clay that her amendments are largely not asking for documents. Again, they are largely asking questions. Of the 11 points, three are clearly asking for documents. The rest are all asking questions that Ms Clay could have put on notice, could have asked me directly or could have sent me a letter about. Let me be clear. Part (9) of Ms Clay’s amendment says:

cost estimates provided to Government by project managers, consultants or design and build firms to construct each different birth centre option from the Feasibility study (Freestanding, Stand Alone and Alongside) ...

I have advised Ms Clay that it is unlikely we will be able to provide cost estimates beyond those provided in the feasibility study, which focused on operational costs. This is because (a) the feasibility study drove the decision on which capital option to pursue, so there would be no firm costings for constructing the non-preferred option, which was

the freestanding birth centre; (b) operational costs far outweigh construction costs; and (c) construction costs have not in any way driven decision-making on this project—that is, the design of this project.

Part (10) of her amendment says:

cost estimates for constructing each birth centre location considered (1, 2, 3, 4, 5 and A, B, C referenced in 21 Jan 2026 powerpoint for briefing of Ms Clay MLA)  
...

I have advised her that this would likely require the creation of a new document as focus has been on feasibility, not cost. It is unlikely we will have cost estimates for a number of options, because they are simply not feasible in meeting the brief, which again largely relates to the ability to transfer to a birth suite, if required, by walking, wheelchair or bed.

Part (11) says:

any cost estimates for increased impact on the hospital and health care system by failing to meet the continuity of care targets ...

That is pretty tangential to the north-side hospital, I would say, and it is a question; it is not requesting a document. To the extent that there is relevant information, it would have already been captured under part (8), in relation to population and birth forecasts.

Part (12) says:

the Government's understanding of what co-design entails, what has the co-design process looked like thus far and what consumers and other stakeholders have been involved in the co-design process (if any) ...

She knows that there has been. And, again, this is a question better asked through a QoN.

Part (13) says:

which stakeholders were engaged with regarding to the new northside birth centre, when they were engaged with (including dates) and summaries of what their feedback was ...

Ms Clay knows the answer to that question. And, again, it is a question. It should have been a QoN.

Part (14) says:

when, how, and who made the final decision to have a model that only contains in-hospital birth centre beds, reasoning for that decision, and why the capacity is the same as the existing level of six birth suite beds ...

I have answered that question and I emphasise again: no final decision has been made. It is absolutely disingenuous to describe this as in-hospital birth centre beds, as though

it is just the same as we currently have.

There are another few where clearly Ms Clay is asking a question. There may be some relevant documents. There may be a lot of them or there may be none. I appreciate that Ms Clay knows that will be the answer.

Debate interrupted.

## Visitor

**MR DEPUTY SPEAKER:** I draw members' attention to the gallery, where the wonderful Ms Emma Davidson, the former member for Murrumbidgee, is.

## North Canberra Hospital—order to table documents

Debate resumed.

**MS VASSAROTTI (Kurrajong) (4.23):** I rise to support Ms Clay's amendment and the motion that has been moved, and to provide some reflections on the north-side hospital infrastructure project that is going on. I want to start by recognising that the recent announcements around this project are welcome, as we know that the investment in this new hospital is really important. We do reflect that the cost per bed for the new north-side hospital appears to be much higher than a typical hospital construction cost in Australia. We know that hospital construction costs tend to be around \$3 million per bed for major projects, but the north-side hospital is costing around \$7 million per bed and, according to the 2019 National Health Performance Authority report, Canberra's hospitals are the most inefficient and expensive to run in Australia.

We want to emphasise the importance of rigorous consultation with all relevant stakeholders—not just about issues such as the centres and the units that are being built, but also, very importantly, about the services that will be delivered. We also emphasise the importance of having plans in place for ways to attract and retain healthcare professionals, so that we are not continually relying on expensive visiting medical officers—VMOs. It is one thing to build a hospital, but it is another thing to staff it, and that is something that we have been struggling with in the ACT.

We are glad to see that more car parking is planned for the new hospital, but we note that, in the meantime, we are keen to see what will be done to address the current difficulties with parking and access to the hospital during this transition period, as it is such a big issue at the moment. We note that there is parking at the CIT in Bruce, with a shuttle bus, but we would like to know what other options the government are considering.

Finally, we reflect that while investment in the new hospital is important, we should also remember that investment in preventive health, so that fewer people end up in hospital in the first place, is at least as important, if not even more so. We believe that we are not currently investing enough in this area.

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

**MS STEPHEN-SMITH** (Kurrajong—Minister for Health, Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Finance and Minister for the Public Service) (4.25), by leave: I move:

Add:

“(19) notwithstanding provisions of standing order 213A, material is to be provided no later than 17 July 2026.”.

As I flagged earlier, my amendment, which is intended to go after Ms Clay’s amendment in the final motion, shifts the reporting date to no later than 17 July 2026. This is prior to estimates, but it gives a bit more time for the team which is currently working on a number of production of document orders.

For the benefit of Ms Vassarotti, I recognise that she has only just returned, but I cannot let her assertion that we are talking about \$7 million per bed stand. Whoever made that calculation may have only been counting the 210 inpatient ward beds. Of course, there are additional beds and treatment spaces in the intensive care unit, maternity and the special care nursery, so there are more than 300 treatment spaces across the new facility. I wanted to clarify that for Ms Vassarotti.

**MR PARTON** (Brindabella—Leader of the Opposition) (4.27): We are in support of Ms Stephen-Smith’s amendment. I would also say that we take on board suggestions from Ms Stephen-Smith on how we should suck eggs. We genuinely take them on board. I speak on behalf of Ms Clay when I say that we are not here to make people’s lives difficult. We are not. I am sure that, after this motion has been passed, both Ms Clay and I, in our respective party rooms, will discuss our protocols on matters like this moving forward and whether there is a better way. We may decide that there is not. Based on the feedback that has been given by the minister, I think it is pertinent for us to do that, but we are certainly in favour of the amendment.

**Ms Stephen-Smith’s** amendment agreed to.

Original question, as amended, resolved in the affirmative.

## **Legal Affairs—Standing Committee Scrutiny report 20**

**MS BARRY** (Ginninderra) (4.28): I present the following report:

Legal Affairs—Standing Committee (Legislative Scrutiny Role)—Scrutiny Report 20, dated 2 June 2026, together with extracts of the relevant minutes of proceedings.

I seek leave to make a brief statement.

Leave granted.

**MS BARRY:** Scrutiny report No 20 contains the committee’s comments on 29 pieces of subordinate legislation and one government response. The report was circulated to members when the Assembly was not sitting. I commend the report to the Assembly.

## **Integrity Commission and Statutory Office Holders—Standing Committee Report 8**

**MR COCKS** (Murrumbidgee) (4.29): I present the following report:

Integrity Commission and Statutory Office Holders—Standing Committee—  
Report 8—Inquiry into the operation of the 2024 ACT Election and Electoral ACT  
1992—Final Report, dated 5 June 2026, including additional comments (Mr  
Braddock), together with extracts of the relevant minutes of proceedings.

I move:

That the report be noted.

This is the eighth report of the Standing Committee on the Integrity Commission and Statutory Office Holders for the Eleventh Assembly. This inquiry was referred to the committee on 4 December 2024. The Electoral Commission's report on the election was published on 12 August 2025, and the committee tabled an interim inquiry report in January 2026.

The interim report addressed issues that could be quickly resolved, to minimise delays in progressing legislative reforms required before the next election. This final report addresses issues which required longer consideration. The committee received 33 submissions and held two public hearings, in November and December 2025.

The committee makes five recommendations in this final report, relating to roadside electoral advertising, campaigning near polling places, the definition of electoral matter, and truth in political advertising laws and artificial intelligence.

The topic of roadside electoral advertising, in particular, generated much discussion amongst committee members, and included safety considerations for candidates, volunteers and drivers. The committee is recommending that a limited number of corflutes be permitted, only within 50 metres of a polling place. The committee discussed at length whether signage should be permitted through the pre-polling period, or only when the polling place is operating. We believe that our recommendation strikes a balance between raising awareness of candidates in the election, allowing political expression, and reducing driver distraction and visual amenity.

On behalf of the committee, I thank the Electoral Commission, the Attorney-General and all participants for their assistance to the committee and their significant contributions to this inquiry. We also thank Hansard and broadcasting staff for their work in supporting the committee.

I thank the other members of the committee, Mr Andrew Braddock MLA and Mr Taimus Werner-Gibbings MLA, and Ms Elizabeth Lee MLA, who was committee chair at the start of the inquiry. I commend the report to the Assembly.

**MR BRADDOCK** (Yerrabi) (4.32): I would also like to speak to this report and express my thanks to my fellow committee members. Other members will notice that I have

made a range of additional comments which are attached to the report. This is because the committee has left a range of topics and issues on the rhetorical cutting-room floor, representing matters on which the committee was unable to reach an agreement. Accordingly, the committee has remained silent on them, but I believe that some of them warrant additional attention here in the Assembly.

The first involves matters of election finance reform. The ACT used to have a \$10,000 donation cap, which was abolished in 2015, based on assertions by the Labor Party that they were incompatible with the Australian Constitution's implied freedom of political communication. This is an assertion that has since been confirmed to have been unfounded.

In fact, very recently, the High Court, in *Hopper v Victoria*, was quite clear in asserting that donations themselves are not political communication at all; rather, it was the electoral expenditure which is enabled by donations that must be considered with respect to the implied freedom. The state of Victoria is currently reconstructing its electoral finance scheme without the provisions which the High Court found to be offending, and members will be interested to know that it includes a \$10,000 donation cap.

Our current regime of election finance should therefore be considered open to renewed reform. That does not just mean restoring donation caps. It also means there is an opportunity to extend donation bans to sectors with a corrupting influence—nicotine, fossil fuels and gambling. The Lung Foundation has called for a ban on donations from the tobacco industry, which is known worldwide for its obstruction of public health initiatives to minimise harm from nicotine addiction.

The fossil fuel industry's obstruction of efforts to deal with climate change is also well known. They repeatedly prioritise their profits over acting on the fundamentals of climate science. The gambling industry are well known for the harm they inflict on people's lives, including as demonstrated by the report produced in the commonwealth parliament under the leadership of the late Peta Murphy MP, who is probably turning in her grave at the inadequacy of federal Labor's limited reforms in this space.

I have seen that Mr Emerson is bringing forward a bill this week. The Greens look forward to reading it in more detail. Based on the commentary we have seen so far, the intentions around pokies are well founded, although I am minded to also think of the ACT government's capture by the Canberra Racing Club.

The other matter I want to raise is the expansion of the voting franchise. The Greens have been talking about lowering the voting age to 16 years for some time, and I would like to assure members that this issue is not going away. More recently, the Greens have raised the idea of expanding voting rights to permanent residents. It is an idea premised on the old saying: no taxation without representation.

To be clear, this is about territory government. This is about people who pay rates in our municipal system, either directly or indirectly through their rent, and who are directly affected by the municipal services that the ACT government provides in their daily lives. Providing voting rights at a municipal level is also not without precedent. For example, the cities of Melbourne and Sydney maintain supplementary electoral

rolls for people with a connection to their cities and who are not otherwise on the AEC's roll of electors.

The Labor and Liberal parties have elected not to engage with this issue in preparing this report, but I make this appeal to you now. At a time when racism and divisive politics are rising, should we not be pushing in the opposite direction? If we want to resist a surge to the far right and their honeyed words of false premises which blame the other, which is what we are seeing from One Nation, we need to expand access to democracy and empower people to have a say in how their lives are governed here in the territory.

To the Canberra Liberals, I say this: you have an opportunity to differentiate yourselves from your federal counterparts who are tearing themselves and their legacy apart at the seams, in terms of the rights of our permanent residents.

These issues that I have just mentioned are ones close to my heart, but they are far from the only issues left unexplored in the committee's report. Members will find a more comprehensive listing in my additional comments.

I want to stress that this failure to engage is not malicious. I am not accusing my colleagues of being derelict in their duty; rather, I believe that our inability to properly consider these issues is a symptom of broader workload issues felt across the Assembly. Members are being pulled in too many directions, and a consequence of that is seen in how we struggle to get at least three members of a committee congregating around a particular problem or its solution. To wit, consistent with the findings of a special report commissioned by former Chief Minister Katy Gallagher in 2013, the ACT Assembly really does need to have 35 MLAs to do its job properly. That is another issue I hope we can come back to.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

## **Standing committees—membership**

**MR PARTON** (Brindabella—Leader of the Opposition) (4.37): In accordance with standing order 223, I move:

That:

- (1) Ms Castley be discharged from, and Ms Barry be appointed to, the Select Committee on Estimates 2026-2027;
- (2) Mr Cocks be discharged from, and Ms Lee be appointed to, the Standing Committee on Integrity Commission and Statutory Office Holders;
- (3) Ms Castley be discharged from the Standing Committee on Transport and City Services and Mr Cain be appointed in her place.

*Ordered that the question be divided.*

**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) (4.39): Just to be clear there is obviously a motion on the

notice paper for Friday. I am still waiting to hear from Mr Cocks in terms of his calculations. There are plenty of conversations going on about one committee in particular. We have no issue with estimates and we have no issue with the integrity thing that Mr Cocks will be discharged from. So both motion (1) and motion (3), as they have now been divided, will be agreed, but I will be seeking to adjourn debate on motion (2), because those conversations are ongoing.

**MR COCKS** (Murrumbidgee) (4.40): I want to clarify that, notwithstanding any future motions, this is a motion that adjusts the Liberal representation on committees today. Should the minister's proposal be passed on Friday, there would clearly be a change to the resolution around the constitution of those committees. But, as they stand today, what we are discussing is in fact the Liberal representation. It is not possible to maintain the membership as it stands with the resolution as it stands. That being the case, this motion simply deals with the facts as they are today.

**MR PARTON** (Brindabella—Leader of the Opposition) (4.41): The first motion is that Ms Leanne Castley be discharged from the Select Committee on Estimates 2026-27 and that Ms Chiaka Barry be appointed to the Select Committee on Estimates 2026-27. I would echo the words of Mr Cocks: this motion deals with the committees as they are today and, should the Assembly make a decision on the basis of a motion that is on the notice paper for Friday to make a change to that, obviously that change would then come into effect. But this motion deals with the committees as they stand today, and I commend this first part of the motion to the Assembly.

Paragraph (1) agreed to.

Paragraph (2) agreed to.

**MR PARTON** (Brindabella—Leader of the Opposition) (4.42): In accordance with standing order 123, I move:

(3) Ms Castley be discharged from the Standing Committee on Transport and City Services and Mr Cain be appointed in her place.

**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) (4.42): I move:

That the debate be adjourned.

The Assembly voted—

Ayes 15

Noes 6

Yvette Berry	Suzanne Orr	Chiaka Barry
Andrew Braddock	Marisa Paterson	Peter Cain
Fiona Carrick	Michael Pettersson	Jeremy Hanson
Leanne Castley	Rachel Stephen-Smith	Elizabeth Lee
Tara Cheyne	Caitlin Tough	James Milligan
Jo Clay	Rebecca Vassarotti	Mark Parton
Thomas Emerson	Taimus Werner-Gibbings	

Laura Nuttall

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Debate (on motion by **Ms Cheyne**) adjourned to the next sitting.

## **Social Policy—Standing Committee Report 5**

**MR EMERSON** (Kurrajong) (4.49): I present the following report:

Social Policy—Standing Committee—Report 5—*Inquiry into men’s suicide rates*, dated 2 June 2026, including a dissenting report (*Miss Nuttall*) together with extracts of the relevant minutes of proceedings—

This is the fifth report of the Standing Committee on Social Policy for the Eleventh Assembly. The committee began this self-referred inquiry on 30 April 2025. The committee received 62 submissions and held three public hearings. Witnesses took 13 questions on notice. Our report makes one finding, which relates to the ACT government’s reporting obligations under the ACT Mental Health and Suicide Regional Plan 2019-2024. The report makes 26 recommendations, which address system leadership and integration and opportunities to strengthen the capability and capacity of frontline services.

The committee recognises the community interest in this inquiry and appreciates the participation of those with lived experience, including families. The committee would also like to acknowledge the health and support services, community sector providers and volunteer peer-led organisations who contributed to this inquiry and support those in our community during crisis.

On behalf of the committee, I would also like to thank the Minister for Health and Mental Health and officials for their participation in this inquiry. I also thank my fellow committee members who participated in this inquiry, our Deputy Chair Ms Barry, Miss Nuttall and Ms Tough, and I also thank the secretariat for their extensive work on this inquiry. I commend the report to the Assembly.

I move:

That the report be noted.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

## **Economics, Industry and Recreation—Standing Committee Statement by chair**

**MR WERNER-GIBBINGS** (Brindabella) (4.51): Pursuant to standing order 246A, I wish to make a statement on behalf of the Standing Committee on Economics, Industry and Recreation relating to recently referred petitions.

Since the start of this year, the following petitions about ACT sporting infrastructure

and facilities have been referred to the committee: petitions No 3-26 and 18-26—diving and deepwater facilities in the new aquatic centre in Commonwealth Park; petitions No 80-25 and 21-26—deliver an ice sports venue in Tuggeranong; petitions No 84-25 and 31-26—closure of Kaleen indoor sports centre; and petitions No 8-26 and 30-26—Hawker Tennis Centre.

The committee has resolved not to inquire into the diving and deepwater facilities at Commonwealth Park or the Tuggeranong ice sports venue. The petitions into the Hawker Tennis Centre have been re-referred to the Standing Committee on Environment and Planning, at that committee's request. At this stage, it is unlikely that this committee will launch a separate inquiry into the Kaleen sports centre. However, we wish to reassure the community that these petitions have influenced the committee's considerations during our current inquiry into barriers and opportunities for participation in community sports in the ACT. The provision of sports facilities was extensively canvassed in the evidence we received in this inquiry, and it will be addressed in our reports.

### **Justice—ACT Law Courts—standing order 118AA Speaker's ruling**

**MR SPEAKER:** Earlier today Mr Cocks took a point of order under standing order 118AA that a minister had not been responsive to a question without notice. Ms Lee asked the Attorney-General the following supplementary question:

Attorney-General, why are Canberra taxpayers paying excessively more than taxpayers in other jurisdictions and still getting a less efficient justice system?

The minister responded by stating:

They are not getting less efficient justice system, Mr Speaker. I think I have been clear about the way that the ACT has been set up and how it currently works—

Members, when considering the answers given to the previous question, the supplementary, that Ms Cheyne answered, I do believe that the minister was responsive to the question and I do not uphold the point of order.

However, I want to make the comment that the minister, after some interjections, said:

Thank you, Mr Speaker. If they are not interested in the answer, I will not give it.

In this case, I have ruled that she had given an answer, despite the minister's comment. I would make the point that, if members think that there are an excessive number of interjections, I would ask that they raise it with the chair and I will stop the interjections and then the minister can continue with their answer. They cannot use interjections as a reason by itself not to answer.

### **Statements by members Emergency Services—Thank a First Responder Day**

**MR CAIN** (Ginninderra) (4.54): As many members would know, today is Thank a First

Responder Day. I want to acknowledge our wonderful first responders, about 2,300, in our ACT community, which include police officers, paramedics, firefighters, SES and, where relevant, marine rescue workers and, of course, their families, who are very much affected by the work of these frontline workers. Every day they stand to protect us, to support us and to get us out of trouble, and they are backed by thousands of trained volunteers who generously give their time and skills to serve others, to serve our community.

Today is all about acknowledging those who put themselves forward, sometimes at great risk to their personal safety. They have to deal with some of the worst moments that our community experiences—whether it is police, ambulance or SES and rescue operations. Their service comes at a cost, because they miss out on a normal schedule of events. It is hard for them to plan their day when an incident occurs that requires their assistance. I believe I am with everyone here to say thank you to all our first responders.

### **Canberra—tourism and events**

**MR BARR** (Kurrajong—Chief Minister, Minister for Economic Development and Minister for Tourism and Trade) (4.55): It was so great to join industry leaders yesterday at the Canberra Region Tourism Advisory Forum to talk about how we are growing a visitor economy, backing local jobs and businesses and supporting investment. Tourism is a key pillar of our economy, supporting tens of thousands of jobs and contributing billions of dollars each year to the territory economy. It is now our second-largest export industry. The budget that the Treasurer is about to deliver will build on a decade of strong partnership with industry, including a \$71 million four-year investment to drive visitation and to grow our tourism economy by an additional \$1 billion in visitor spend between now and 2030.

Events are, of course, a major drawcard for Canberra. Over seven million attendees have attended major events in Canberra since we established our Major Events Fund. So it is great to see further investment in that fund as well as continued investment in destination marketing, continuing infrastructure priorities like the National Convention Entertainment Centre and the construction of the 2,000 seat lyric theatre that is going on just across from this place. New events and great investment in tourism are continuing to make Canberra a great place to visit and an even better place to live.

### **Mrs Vicki Dunne OAM—King’s Birthday honours**

**MR PARTON** (Brindabella—Leader of the Opposition) (4.57): I rise today to acknowledge the outstanding service of former member for Ginninderra, Mrs Vicki Dunne OAM, who was honoured over the weekend in the King’s Birthday Honours List. When I was first elected in 2016, I got so much assistance from Mrs Dunne. I turned up as the newbie, with no real idea how things worked in this place, and Mrs Dunne took me under her wing and gave me amazing guidance. I saw her as the distinguished elder stateswoman of the party, so much so that I have never, ever addressed her as Vicki—always Mrs Dunne; and Mrs Dunne it always will be.

Mrs Dunne served the people of the ACT with dedication and integrity for over 16 years in this Assembly. During that time she was a tireless advocate for her electorate, for

veterans, for women's health and for the many community groups who knew they could rely on her to listen and to act. She brought to this place a deep sense of duty and a willingness to stand up for what she believed was right even if that was difficult. That kind of service does not end when a term ends. It is fitting that her contribution has now been formally recognised at the national level.

On behalf of the Assembly, I congratulate Mrs Dunne on this well-deserved honour and I thank her for the years of service she gave to our community and to the institution of this parliament.

### **Emergency Services—Thank a First Responder Day**

**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) (4.58): I would also like to recognise the Thank a First Responder Day. It is a day for all of us to recognise and thank first responders who, under physically and emotionally demanding conditions, support our community every single day.

In the ACT, we are fortunate to have dedicated personnel from ACT Policing, the ACT Ambulance Service, ACT Fire and Rescue, ACT community fire units, our Women's Fire Service, our SES and St John's Ambulance. I take this opportunity to sincerely thank every single one of them. Whether they serve as a volunteer or a staff member, their commitment and hard work make our community a safer place. Our frontline responders sacrifice time with their family and loved ones. They work day and night, often in the most challenging conditions, to support others.

Unfortunately, last night there were two separate incidents involving violence directed at our paramedics and police. My heartfelt thoughts go to those who were affected. Let me be clear: violence against emergency services workers is never acceptable. Our paramedics, police officers and first responders show up every day to care for and protect our community. They deserve respect and safety. So, today, on Thank a First Responder Day, I want to reiterate the really important role that first responders play in our community.

*Discussion concluded.*

### **Appropriation Bill 2026-2027**

**Mr Steel**, pursuant to notice, presented the bill, its explanatory statement and a Human Rights Act compatibility statement.

**Mr Steel**, pursuant to notice, presented the bill, its explanatory statement, a Human Rights Act compatibility statement and the following supplementary papers:

Budget 2026-2027—Financial Management Act, pursuant to section 10—

Budget at a Glance.

Budget Outlook.

Budget Statements—

A—ACT Executive | ACT Integrity Commission | Auditor-General | Electoral Commission | Office of the Legislative Assembly.

B—Chief Minister, Treasury and Economic Development Directorate together with associated agencies.

C—Health and Community Services Directorate | ACT Local Hospital Network | Canberra Health Services | Housing ACT.

D—Justice and Community Safety Directorate | Legal Aid Commission (ACT) | Public Trustee and Guardian for the ACT.

E—City and Environment Directorate | Transport Canberra Operations | ACT Gambling and Racing Commission | Cemeteries and Crematoria Authority | Suburban Land Agency.

F—Education Directorate.

G—Infrastructure Canberra.

H—Digital Canberra.

Financial Management Act, pursuant to subsection 62(1)—Statements of Intent—  
2026-2027—

ACT Long Service Leave Authority.

Building and Construction Industry Training Fund Authority.

Title read by Clerk.

**MR STEEL** (Murrumbidgee—Treasurer, Minister for Planning and Sustainable Development, Minister for Heritage and Minister for Transport) (5.00): I move:

That this bill be agreed to in principle.

The budget I hand down today delivers for all Canberrans. It is a Labor budget, and it is both responsible and responsive to the needs of the community and the economic conditions that we face.

It is a budget framed in the context of ongoing economic uncertainty from Donald Trump's war in the Middle East—a war which has put real pressure on Canberrans, just as it has put pressure on the territory budget.

In times of economic uncertainty and financial pressures, nothing is more important than secure housing, community and social support and a stable local economy.

The budget that I hand down today is fundamentally about housing, more support for frontline services and caring for our community. It continues to deliver on our target of enabling 30,000 new homes for Canberrans. It provides certainty and security for our most vulnerable Canberrans, locking in funding for our community service providers, supporting them and expanding funding in the areas of most significant need. It is a budget that continues the ACT Labor government's legacy of investing in health, education, infrastructure and the services that make Canberra one of the best places to live in the world.

Despite uncertain economic conditions, this is also a responsible budget, where we have

continued to take measured steps to repair the budget and focus on government and community priorities.

## **Housing**

There is nothing more central to economic and social stability and success than housing. Through the 2026-27 budget, the government is making the most significant investment since self-government to supply more homes for Canberrans. We are doing this because we understand the challenges faced in the housing market and we believe that current and future generations of Canberrans should have the opportunity to own their own home.

The Labor Party does not believe in being the party of renters or being a party that would advantage landlords over homeowners. We fundamentally believe that all working Canberrans should be able to buy a home and that those who cannot work or who have been disenfranchised by society should be supported by social and affordable housing.

Today we are delivering the most significant budget for new housing in the territory's history. From 1 July, we are completely and permanently eliminating stamp duty for all first home buyers buying a home to live in. This complements the tax reforms announced by the federal Labor government which also focus on supporting Australians to own their own home.

In this budget we are also cutting stamp duty for every single unit sold off the plan and turn-key units, including new missing middle homes built under our government's landmark Missing Middle Housing Reforms. To encourage and support builders to take up the zoning reforms, we will halve the codified lease variation charge on missing middle housing projects. The government has funded the establishment of a "Canberra House" pattern book of high-quality preapproved missing middle home designs that can be built without a development application, so that we can fast track the construction of more low-rise missing middle homes that are well designed and fit in well with Canberra's streets and climate.

But, Mr Speaker, at the centre of this budget is a generational investment in new affordable, community and public homes. Our government strongly believes that building public and community homes is a priority. We are incredibly proud that, in this budget to announce a new public housing pipeline, with funding for 450 additional public homes. We will build these homes and, where we can, we will purchase them off the market in suburbs right across Canberra. On top of the homes, we will add to the government's stock. We are backing our community housing sector to build over 1,000 new affordable and community homes.

This is the first stage of a massive investment in public, social and affordable housing. After 10 years of a commonwealth housing policy vacuum under the Liberals, we are taking full advantage of the federal Labor government's housing finance—partnering with a commonwealth government that plays an active role in providing housing and wants to work with us to get it done.

At the same time that we are building more homes, we are also funding the largest

structural uplift in maintaining and repairing our existing public housing properties for thousands of Canberrans. We will bring more properties back into use and continue insourcing public housing maintenance staff to deliver better and more responsive services to tenants.

We are investing not just because supplying housing is moral imperative, but because housing is the largest cost that households face in the current economy.

### **Economy**

The war in the Middle East has had a significant effect on the ACT economy, as it has around the country and the world. The ACT government has acted in a coordinated but targeted way to address this supply-side shock, while at the same time incurring significant additional costs associated with rising fuel and other prices. We have contributed \$8.2 million in revenue to cut fuel excise to 30 June and supported the heavy vehicle sector to respond to higher diesel prices.

Despite the challenges of the global oil shock, the ACT economy remains resilient, with a growing economy, lower inflation than the rest of Australia and low unemployment. In 2024-25, the ACT economy grew by three and a half per cent, marking 29 consecutive years of growth and making the ACT's economy the fastest-growing in the country.

Strong economic growth is forecast to continue, though at a reduced level compared to forecasts in the budget review, with gross state product growth expected to be three and a quarter per cent in 2026-27.

With inflation driving elevated interest rates and uncertain conditions resulting from the war, the ACT government has had to be measured in the steps that we could take towards budget repair and providing cost-of-living relief. The government has targeted cost-of-living relief to Canberrans who need it most, with additional funding for food relief, family school expenses, tertiary student public transport concessions, reducing home energy costs and providing housing crisis support.

The government is also supporting the construction sector through our growing pipeline of non-market housing and our microeconomic reforms to streamline planning and building processes, enhancing construction productivity and enabling more homes to be built for Canberrans sooner.

### **Fiscal strategy**

The 2026-27 budget continues our responsible approach to managing the territory's finances and ensuring that they improve on a sustainable path.

Last year, I set out a new fiscal strategy for the government, including a return to operating cash surpluses followed by a return to headline net operating balance surpluses over the forward estimates. The government is delivering against these targets. This budget, the government will build on the fiscal strategy by including new specific and measurable targets.

Because of the responsible measures that the government has taken to manage the budget and control expenditure, the budget deficit has reduced from \$1.131 billion in 2024-25 to \$501.7 million in 2025-26—the single-biggest improvement in the fiscal position in the territory’s history.

The headline net operating balance is forecast to be in deficit by \$323.4 million in 2026-27, which reflects a further year to year improvement of \$178.3 million from the estimated outcome from 2025-26. The budget continues to show a return to HNOB surplus over the forward estimates, reaching balance in 2027-28 before surpluses of \$244.2 million in 2028-29 and \$355.7 million in 2029-30.

In last year’s budget, we set out to achieve the target of returning to a cash operating surplus over the forward estimates. Today, I am pleased to say that the net operating cash position is budgeted to be in surplus in 2026-27 by \$109 million, followed by strong surpluses in future years.

While the headline net operating balance is still in deficit, the return to a cash operating balance surplus is an important step. This ensures we can continue to sustainably deliver the services and infrastructure improvements our community needs.

There are no silver bullet solutions to the territory’s fiscal challenges, and so we will continue to take responsible steps to ensure that both expenditure and revenue are sustainable.

## **Revenue**

In the current economy, the government has had to be balanced and measured in our decisions on revenue to support budget repair.

To maintain a stable property tax base, the average residential rates bill will increase by no more than five per cent in 2026–27, with commercial general rates rising in line with residential general rates settings.

Our progressive system means that some Canberrans will see rates increases that are below average while others who have had significant relative increases in property values will pay more. Thousands of Canberrans will pay less this year in their rates bills than last year.

Overall, our approach supports ongoing tax reform as well as revenue growth while recognising current cost-of-living pressures.

The government will ask Canberrans choosing to buy higher-polluting vehicles to contribute more through motor vehicle duty. However, in response to escalating fuel costs, the government will delay the implementation of additional indexation to motor vehicle registration announced in the 2025-26 budget.

The demand and cost growth in our hospital system over recent years has been significant and required an additional investment of \$1.19 billion in the health care of Canberrans last budget. Minister Stephen-Smith has worked tirelessly on the

sustainability of the health system and to negotiate better outcomes with the commonwealth and New South Wales governments on health funding in the past year. I am pleased to say that the budget reflects the outcomes of this advocacy, with extra funding from the commonwealth through a new five year National Health Reform Agreement which has provided a fairer level of support for our hospitals and recognised the extra costs of delivering these acute services in small jurisdictions like the ACT. With additional commonwealth funding secured under the National Health Reform Agreement to support ACT health services, the government will remove the health levy at the end of June.

No further payroll tax changes are proposed in the budget, recognising the challenging economic circumstances for small business and that payroll tax changes announced in last year's budget come into effect from July for affected businesses.

The budget shows a write down in GST revenue due to reductions in the ACT's relativity in the 2026 update and the ACT's share of the Australian population. However, we expect the 2026 census in August to again show a significant undercount of our population by the Australian Bureau of Statistics. The government will continue to campaign until the systemic undercount of the ACT's population is fixed, so that we receive the fair level of funding for our actual population in between censuses.

### **Expenditure**

This budget builds on the tough measures that we took on expenditure in last year's budget, through the whole-of-government savings measure. A continued effort is being made by all ACT government agencies to meet their budgets and focus on government priorities.

The government's new expenditure measures are focused on frontline services to meet the needs of our growing community. Many of the new measures re-baseline the public service, funding ongoing staff into the future where we know that we have an essential need. By taking longer-term spending decisions on initiatives, this sees a reduction in the expected improvement over the forward estimates but also better reflects forward expenditure and service delivery expectations of the community.

However, to achieve the savings, we have also had to make the tough decision to ensure ACT government agencies operate within their allocated budgets. This will be supported through investment in a new restructure fund to allow agencies to right-size and ensure the profile of the service reflects community priorities. New control measures will also be introduced across the government to limit the use of external contractors.

In this budget, we have introduced broader fiscal controls on the growth of the ACT public service. A new fiscal rule will mean that any future growth in the public service is aligned with population growth. This will still see the ACT public service continue to grow in the future but not faster than our community. It will allow revenue and expenditure to realign gradually without the need to resort to deep cuts.

### **Infrastructure program**

The ACT government has also made the responsible decision in this budget to undertake targeted reductions to the territory's infrastructure program.

The government will continue to make generational investments in health, education, transport and suburban infrastructure. However, in the budget, we are transitioning from a historically high level of capital investment to a more sustainable and deliverable long-term baseline. The average annual capital spend will reduce below \$1 billion per year, following major one-off payments for generational infrastructure in the 2027-28 financial year.

The infrastructure program changes led by the Chief Minister will deliver more than \$700 million in savings to the budget over four years, while the government maintains a strong pipeline of investment delivering on election commitments and priorities. This ensures that we have the room to deliver a once-in-a-generation investment in the territory's healthcare system in the north-side hospital.

### **Community sector**

There is no more important partner in meeting the community's needs than our community sector. The budget recognises the important role of the ACT's community sector in supporting the most vulnerable Canberrans and the pressures faced by the organisations that support them.

We have responded to feedback from community sector organisations and the Assembly about ending "funding cliffs". We have provided longer-term and ongoing funding for key programs delivered by community sector organisations, including those that had previously only been funded on an annual basis which have had their history as pilot programs. We recognise that these roles have become essential and continued funding enables the sector to employ staff and plan ongoing services. While providing longer-term funding has a reduced forecast level of surplus in the budget outyears, this is a conscious decision of government to ensure ongoing responsiveness, certainty and transparency to the sector.

In addition to providing the sector longer-term funding certainty through the budget, we have also recognised the need for additional funding for community organisations to meet demand in key areas, including responding to homelessness and domestic, family and sexual violence. We will provide additional funding for the community sector to support reform underway to deliver a longer-term funding model that is focused on meeting the community's changing needs into the future.

### **Education**

The budget shows a substantial investment to reform our school education system. Minister Berry has tabled the expert panel's report into school resourcing, outlining very real funding pressures in our schools and the need for a system-wide response to deliver a high-quality education system for our children.

The Future of Education: One public education system will create opportunity,

strengthen fairness, level the playing field and ensure every child, no matter what their background, can be supported in their learning. I commend the work Minister Berry is doing on engaging with school communities and reform underway to shift from a legacy of autonomous schools to become a single public education system, including centralising functions like other school systems across Australia.

Based on the expert panel's recommendations, the government is developing a new approach to manage challenging behaviours in our schools. We will continue to be the only jurisdiction funding our schools above the full School Resourcing Standard, because our Labor government values teachers and the education of Canberra's students. The future success of our children is why our government is so focused on education at all levels.

In those education settings, the safety of our children is always a priority. I am pleased to announce in this budget that we are making one of the largest expansions to the ACT's Early Childhood regulator to ensure our early childhood services are keeping Canberra children safe and delivering the high-quality early learning that we know gives children the best start.

### **Investment in local services**

The ACT government's remit is broader than any other government in Australia, and our community reasonably expects the highest level of service in the country.

In the budget we continue to make investments in the frontline services our community needs.

This budget responds to the needs in our health system by investing in better health services for Canberrans. This includes expanding the Canberra Hospital Paediatric Fracture Clinic and establishing a dedicated paediatric orthopaedic service, improving care closer to home for children. We will also support the operations of the new Acute Palliative Care Unit at the Canberra Hospital, expected to begin next year.

We are meeting growing demand for emergency services with additional firefighters and paramedics and by progressing a new combined city police station and headquarters.

We are investing in our justice system by providing for a structural uplift in funding for the Director of Public Prosecutions, with a focus on ensuring that those who experience family and domestic violence have their day in court and see justice.

We will continue to lead the nation on climate change and supporting our environment, with funding in the budget laying the groundwork for the delivery of key elements of the new climate change strategy soon to be handed down by Minister Orr.

We are providing a structural shift in funding for arts organisations, delivering our election commitments and ensuring that our city remains a culturally vibrant place to live.

From Hall to Hume and Higgins to Hughes we are delivering local infrastructure and

services, from bike paths to waste management to better roads to improved public spaces and sportsgrounds.

### **Conclusion**

Our budget delivers for all Canberrans generational investments in homes, health and services for our community. It is a responsible and responsive budget. Despite the impacts of Donald Trump's war in the Middle East, there are no massive tax hikes, no deep cuts to essential services and a continued program of investment in our community.

The changes we have made and the work that we have done will support the ACT's finances to remain sustainable. The budget ensures that Canberrans can continue to enjoy the highest quality of life in the country.

I acknowledge and thank the members of the Assembly that provided the government with supply and note our progress against our agreed agenda. I ask for the Assembly's support in our task of continuing fiscal repair and funding for the essential services that the community relies on.

I commend the budget to the Assembly.

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

### **Appropriation (Office of the Legislative Assembly) Bill 2026-2027**

**Mr Steel**, pursuant to notice, presented the bill, its explanatory statement and a Human Rights Act compatibility statement.

Title read by Clerk.

**MR STEEL** (Murrumbidgee—Treasurer, Minister for Planning and Sustainable Development, Minister for Heritage and Minister for Transport) (5.22): I move:

That this bill be agreed to in principle.

I present today the important Office of the Legislative Assembly Appropriation Bill, which provides funding for the running of the Legislative Assembly and the officers of the Assembly. The bill provides for total appropriations of \$4.627 million for the Auditor-General; \$5.445 million for the Electoral Commissioner; \$8.911 million for the Integrity Commissioner; and \$29.412 million for the Office of the Legislative Assembly.

As part of these investments, the government will provide further funding to the Office of the Legislative Assembly to support upgrades to the roof of the Assembly building and fire compliance and to strengthen security in the precinct. This includes investments to support physical security for all occupants of the building. The budget further provides funding to Elections ACT to support the role of delivering territory elections,

including increasing the operational capacity of the commission, and further funding to support upgrades to Elections ACT's election-related ICT infrastructure.

Mr Speaker, I thank you, the Office of the Legislative Assembly and the officers on their engagement through the budget process. I commend the appropriation to the Assembly.

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

## **Standing orders—suspension**

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

That so much of the standing orders be suspended as would prevent Notice No 2, Private Member's Business relating to proposed changes to NDIS being called on and debated forthwith.

## **National Disability Insurance Scheme**

**MISS NUTTALL** (Brindabella) (5.24): I move:

That this Assembly:

(1) notes that:

- (a) modelling by the Federal Treasury on 27 May 2026 projects 241,000 participants cut from the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) by mid-2031, despite the Federal Minister for Health and Ageing, the Hon Mark Butler MP, announcing 160,000 participants would be cut on 22 April 2026;
- (b) people with disability in Canberra are already experiencing reductions or removals of supports within NDIS plans;
- (c) the proposed new functional capacity assessment model has not yet been designed, consulted on or implemented;
- (d) the Australian Human Rights Commission said “a two-week consultation period is wholly inadequate for reforms of this scale, which have significant implications for people's rights, lives and livelihoods. Proceeding without appropriate scrutiny creates a clear risk of adverse and unintended human rights impacts”;
- (e) the dissenting report of the Australian Senate's Community Affairs Legislation Committee report entitled *National Disability Insurance Scheme Amendment (Getting the NDIS Back on Track No. 1) Bill 2024 [Provisions]* states that:
  - (i) “Foundational Supports are currently non-existent and must first be established by the States and Territories, which the Government itself acknowledged would take at least two years just to develop a strategy”; and
  - (ii) “it is critical that [Foundational Supports] be designed and implemented before there's any change in any other aspects of the ecosystem”;

- (f) Foundational Supports are not yet fully operational or embedded in communities in the ACT for either adults or children;
  - (g) the 2026-2027 Budget submission of the ACT Disability Advocacy Caucus said “demand for advocacy, inclusive education capacity, health access, services and interventions, Foundational Supports and accessible infrastructure continue to outstrip supply”;
  - (h) the Minister for Disability, Carers and Community Services is working with community to codesign Thriving Kids, however, these Foundational Supports will not help adult participants;
  - (i) the National Disability Insurance Scheme Amendment (Securing the NDIS for Future Generations) Bill 2026 (Cwlth) (the bill) proposes a new Section 34A(1) that would allow the Federal Minister to make unilateral decisions to determine reduced funding for groups of support without state and territory disability ministers’ approval; and
  - (j) the bill’s explanatory memorandum states that “changes to the NDIS Act do not require the formal agreement of states and territories. However, some reforms require Category A NDIS rule changes that require unanimous state and territory agreement”;
- (2) calls on the Minister for Disability, Carers and Community Services, Treasurer and Chief Minister to:
- (a) publicly oppose the proposed changes to the NDIS until Foundational Supports for all adults and children in the ACT are fully funded, operational and embedded in communities;
  - (b) publicly oppose all elements of the bill that would erode state and territory ministers’ ability to block funding cuts to participants’ plans;
  - (c) meaningfully consult with people with disabilities in the Territory, including a reasonable timeframe and inquiry process and involving Disabled People’s Organisations, before agreeing to proposed changes;
  - (d) exercise existing territory powers relating to the NDIS rules of the NDIS Act to oppose cuts to participants’ plans before Foundational Supports are fully embedded in community; and
  - (e) report back on these actions by 15 September 2026; and
- (3) calls on every Minister to reaffirm their commitment to the human rights of people with a disability in line with the *Human Rights Act 2004 (ACT)* and the United Nations *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities*.

Today I rise to move a motion in my name which calls on ministers of the ACT government to publicly oppose proposed cuts to the NDIS until foundational supports for all adults and children are fully funded, operational and embedded in our communities. I call on the ACT government to use its existing legislative powers under the NDIS Act to do so.

A fellow Canberran, a woman with a disability who was kind enough to share her experiences publicly through the *Canberra Times* last week, said:

It’s terrifying because you do not know what’s going to come ... The whole disabled community is trying to scream at the top of its lungs, ‘don’t do this to us’, but it feels like nobody is listening.

I am moving this motion today because people with a disability here in the ACT are scared. They are genuinely scared about what the NDIS cuts mean for them, and I do not blame them. When you have a federal government—your own elected representatives—telling you that the scheme that you rely on to live, to have your inalienable needs met, and to continue to engage with your community needs to be drastically cut because it is costing the government too much money, of course you will be scared; of course you will be angry. When you are told that one in five of you, and now closer to one in three of you, will lose access to all your support, when you are told that your right to these supports should be determined by an automated decision-maker—a computer, not a person—and when you are told the amount you are able to spend to compensate the support worker who takes you to the doctor, to get your groceries, or to, God forbid, get some sunshine and community connection is going to be halved, any rational person would be furious and terrified. This is what has happened to people with a disability over the last few months.

In the territory sitting week that followed the federal government's pre-budget announcement that it would be cutting \$36 billion from the NDIS, the minister for disability delivered a statement to the Assembly in response to these proposed changes. The minister read out statements from people with a disability and we listened to their gut-wrenching accounts, each of whom had been rocked by the announcement of the proposed changes. The minister retold the accounts of these people, and the common themes were clear: people with a disability had been left out of decision-making processes when it came to cuts, and they were fearful of the impending changes. The ACT Disability Advisory Council's statement said:

The lack of meaningful consultation has left us feeling unheard and at times unsafe about our future.

Proposed cuts under the federal government's new NDIS bill are cruel and they are a fundamental betrayal of people with a disability across Australia. The federal Labor government has had our community scrambling to meet their timeline. People with a disability, their loved ones, advocacy groups, peak bodies and commissions alike were given two weeks to provide feedback on 400 pages of legislation and a dense explanatory memorandum racking up 270-odd pages of grim news.

It is pretty telling when the Australian Human Rights Commission holds, in their own words, "serious concerns" about what the NDIS bill before the federal parliament was to do. Their own submission provides a disclaimer that they were not given enough time to provide an exhaustive list of concerns, but here are some of the highlights. They stated:

... measures proposed in the Bill as well as the Ministerial discourse about the changes place stronger emphasis on financial considerations in decision making than on human rights. This reinforces an ableist framing of people with disability as a cost pressure to be managed, rather than as people who have rights and who are entitled to equality and participation.

However, there is little evidence of targeted consultation on the specific measures proposed in this Bill, and the current two-week consultation timeframe is manifestly insufficient for reforms of this scale.

More fundamentally, the Bill departs from a participatory, co-design approach. Genuine co-design requires people with disability to shape the design of reforms *before* policy settings are settled, rather than being consulted after the fact.

And, despite everything—despite the ludicrously short two-week period and the wave of sheer horror many people would have felt reading about the proposed cuts—people with a disability have shown up. They flooded the federal government’s inquiry into the 2026 NDIS bill with over 4,000 submissions—and credit to them for doing so. This kind of work under duress puts people in pain. It exacerbates flare-ups and takes people out of daily life to do something they should not ever have had to do.

I note that there are a lot of anonymous submissions to this bill. I have been in conversations with Canberrans talking about the fear of reprisal, knowing that some people here in the ACT have already had their plans put up for review, even before this bill has been debated in the Senate. But, still, Canberrans with a disability have done everything in their power to oppose these changes.

This is, of course, in front of federal parliament, so some might wonder why I do not simply leave this up to my federal Greens counterpart Senator Jordon Steele-John to make these points. Notwithstanding the fact that Senator Steele-John deploys a much more articulate and colourful turn of phrase than I do, the sheer scale of the federal government’s nightmare reforms overshadow a very real role and obligation of the ACT government, and we cannot let them off the hook.

First of all, there are thousands of people with a disability in Canberra who will be impacted by these changes and we, in this place, work for them. We were elected to serve them. Around 80,000 people in Canberra have a disability, 10,000 of whom have NDIS plans. Our best estimates say that we have around 50,000 unpaid carers, many of whom have disabilities themselves, and we have between 13,000 and 22,000 NDIS support workers.

Even if you are not moved by individual people’s stories, their rights and their wellbeing, though I suspect everyone in this chamber is, the most jaded neoliberal among us cannot ignore the economic impact of cutting employment for thousands of support workers, increasing unpaid care workloads and forcing, mind you, predominantly women out of paid work or volunteering. I borrow these words from a friend: “Will they still be able to have a shower every day or even every second day? Will they still be able to access counselling to keep their mental illness in a recovery phase and not end up back in hospital? Will they be able to continue going to support programs that help them build skills to continue their education or employment?” It goes on.

But it is not just about the impact these cuts will have on people in the ACT; it is about what the ACT can do about these proposed changes, because we are not utterly powerless here. One of the things Minister Butler said at his press conference, nary a breath after talking about reducing the scheme from 760,000 people to 600,000 by the end of the decade, is:

As we have done with Thriving Kids, we will also work on establishing programs with States which the NDIS Review described as ‘Foundational Supports’—to give

quality local supports to people who are not given access to the NDIS.

He continued:

Like Thriving Kids, this will see us rebuild systems that used to be there for people with less significant support needs in partnership with the community and States and Territories.

Indeed, the federal Labor government's answer to so many people with a disability is: "Don't worry. The states and territories will be there to catch your fall with foundational supports. That is your safety net." But this implies that the safety net, foundational supports, is up and running, fully operational and embedded in our communities already. They are not.

Even before the first big round of NDIS cuts were proposed, foundational supports—supports that do not require an NDIS plan for access—were part of the vision. They looked like accessible public housing, teaching support in our schools, community mental health services outside of hospital settings, accessible transport, and peer groups for disabled people and their carers. Since then, foundational supports have become the mythical stopgap, standing between those losing their essential supports to the fine-toothed shredder of fiscal sustainability and a social support system that looks to abandon them entirely.

The ACT government know that foundational supports must be in place as soon as possible. If they did not know, they would not have committed \$19 million to foundational supports in the 2024-25 budget. I know some of that has been drawn down to fund Thriving Kids, which will help kids aged zero to eight with mild to moderate developmental delays and those who are autistic, but it will not help other kids with a disability and it will not help anyone above the age of eight who needs more support, or any of the one in three or so being kicked off the scheme entirely by 2030.

The ACT Labor government, I would argue, possesses significant political capital. Their minister for disability sits at the National Disability Reform Council meetings, their Chief Minister sits on First Ministers meetings, their Treasury signs up on, and ideally drives, joint funding initiatives, and they are all from the same party, so surely that holds sway.

I said before that we are not powerless here. Quite literally, legally, we are not powerless here. It is in section 209 of the federal NDIS Act, which makes state and territorial powers very clear. There are NDIS rules, which are legislative instruments that sit under the act. They come in four categories. In the interest of time, I will not read them out now, but I note that the federal government's NDIS legal fact sheet is excellent at explaining them.

There are proposed changes under the NDIS bill that will require changes to some category A laws—those for which you would require the agreement of all states and territories. A lot of this is to do with defining functional capacity and developing a functional assessment process, which is actually pretty broad in the bill and pretty widely opposed by advocates. This is where the ACT government already has some power—where these rule changes will make things worse for Canberrans with a

disability; where they might lead to people's funding being reduced or kicking them from the scheme entirely. We need the ACT government's minister for disability to use the powers prescribed to her under law to oppose these reforms and protect her constituents.

If the federal government is determined to escalate this, they might dispute the minister's opinion and seek the agreement of first ministers and, in our case, the Chief Minister, where they may only need a majority. But the Chief Minister still has one of those votes and we expect him to wield every bit of influence he can to keep his constituents safe and supported.

Further to this, ministers of the territory should publicly oppose the proposed changes that risk doing harm to the people of this territory. And, thanks to a response to a question lodged by Mr Cain, we have hard evidence that the ACT government is aware of this risk. The question Mr Cain lodged states:

What risks has the Government identified regarding delivery readiness by October 2026.

The government response signed by the minister for disability states:

... risks primarily relate to key information still being sought from the Australian Government ... of service design. This includes ... definitions of low to moderate support needs, the services to be delivered by the Commonwealth and their timing ... eligibility for the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS), and the interface between Thriving Kids and the NDIS.

I do not think we can be any clearer from this. The government knows that the alternative supports which are meant to be the safety net for those being cut under the proposed changes to the NDIS are not fully designed already for the community, so we are calling on the government to act on this change.

There are sections of the new NDIS bill that further seek to erode state and territory ministers' power to knock back changes that will harm participants. A good example of this is the proposed section 34A(1), which would let the commonwealth minister make a ruling to reduce funding for groups of people by some percentage to ensure financial sustainability of the scheme. Mind you, this is money that people on NDIS plans have been found to be entitled to. Under the proposed changes, if Minister Butler wants to save his government money, he can punch some numbers into a calculator and say, "You're only going to get 80 per cent of the funding for, say, assistive technology"—it is on the list—"that you are entitled to." I put my hand on my heart and say I am not being alarmist. Look it up; read it for yourself. It is on pages 29 and 30 of the bill's explanatory memorandum.

These are the powers the bill would create for the commonwealth minister, and these are powers that the states and territories must oppose. Our territory ministers have powers and they have influence. They must use that to stop the erosion of their own ability to intervene when the federal government does not take the rights and wellbeing of people with a disability to heart.

One of the most worrying parts of the NDIS cuts is the removal of funding in people's

plans for social and community participation. The Inclusive Communities Fund, which the federal government has announced will replace the funding for these supports, is nothing of the sort either. Analysis from UNSW states:

... this funding replaces a fraction of what will be cut from participant plans. It also represents a reallocation of funding away from people with 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.

These kinds of supports, social and community participation, enable people to get to work, go to medical appointments and do their shopping and cooking—all of the things that enable someone with a disability to live independently and with dignity, and, indeed, for some to live at all. The narrative being picked up by the federal government that the funding of people's plans for social and community participation is being used for people to go out for coffee or go to the movies with their support workers is misleading, dangerous and, worst of all, on purpose. It makes people with a disability out to be abusing the system when they are merely participating in society. With full credit, in the words of the minister for disability:

... living an ordinary life and participating meaningfully in our community is not something people with disability should be made to feel ashamed of or feel they need to apologise for.

Why, then, has this minister not yet opposed the very changes that would hinder people's ability to meaningfully participate in their community? The harmful narrative about this funding uses people with a disability as scapegoats and it evades the truth of the matter—that, as long as the government is prepared to kick people off supports before they have proper alternatives in place, they cannot pretend to care about people with disabilities who will be left stranded in the fallout of these cuts.

This forms the basis of what my motion is calling for today. The ACT Greens are calling on the ACT government, the Chief Minister, the Treasurer and minister for disability to publicly oppose the proposed changes to the NDIS until foundational supports for all adults and children in the ACT are fully funded, operational and embedded in communities. This is not radical and this call is coming from the community.

This motion is giving the ministers and the Labor Party in the ACT an opportunity right now to show people with a disability, who they were elected to represent, that they care about them. The key word here is "show", because people telling you they care means little when supports are being taken away in real time and the people who represent you are not stepping in to try to stop it. This motion gives ministers an opportunity to show not only that they know that there is real fear and pain being felt in the disability community right now but also that they are willing to stand up for it and stand by people with a disability, who the federal government seem intent on shutting out.

**MR CAIN** (Ginninderra) (5.40): I want to speak to Miss Nuttall's motion and thank her for bringing it to the Assembly this afternoon. My comments are going to be informed as well by—as Miss Nuttall kindly touched on—some answers to questions on notice that I have received recently: in particular, question on notice 1156, on foundational supports funding; question on notice 1121, on Thriving Kids development

and implementation; and question on notice 1159, on communication about Thriving Kids.

I will reflect on Miss Nuttall's motion and also the conversations I have had with Miss Nuttall and my other colleagues as well. I particularly thank Ms Barry, former shadow minister for disability, for her input. Reflecting on all of that, including the answers to questions on notice, it does seem that there is a bit of a disconnect between the confidence that the government is projecting publicly about the rollout of foundational supports and the impact of the of the NDIS changes on our community and the reality that many key implementation details are still unresolved.

The biggest issue is that the government are speaking with certainty about rollout dates but are simultaneously acknowledging that they are still designing major parts of the system. That is not a great place to be in from a governance point of view, and I think it creates a bit of nervousness our community. For example, Minister Orr says that Thriving Kids will commence 1 October 2026 and will be fully implemented by 1 January 2028, but in the same response admits that the detail of individual service components is still being developed and has not been considered by the government. Similarly, the minister says that there are no operational readiness concerns while at the same time acknowledging unresolved risks around eligibility definitions, commonwealth responsibilities, timing, workforce capability and the interface between Thriving Kids and the NDIS itself. Some conflicting messages are coming through.

On workforce, the government says planning has commenced but detailed staff and requirements have not been finalised. In practice, they are committing to rolling out timelines before knowing how many allied health workers, support staff or providers will actually be provided. There is also a tension in the funding responses. The minister says there is no funding shortfall but repeatedly references operating within a fixed funding envelope and designing services carefully to stay within that limit, but that raises concerns that the model is being designed around cost containment rather than the needs of participants.

So it seems that the government is attempting to project confidence and control while, effectively, managing major reform on the run and unresolved elements of that reform. Our community, as Miss Nuttall has touched on, is rightly concerned about the supports that will disappear before replacement services are genuinely in place and who may be left behind because of that.

I again thank Miss Nuttall at this stage of proceedings and anticipate support from the Greens on this matter. The amendment that I have circulated but not yet moved strengthens the accountability mechanism that the heart of this motion is driving at. Miss Nuttall's motion argues foundational supports are not yet operational or embedded. The amendment creates a mechanism to prove readiness before supports are reduced. Miss Nuttall's motion calls for meaningful consultation and reporting, which is very important, of course. The amendment that I will later move operationalises that through a road map with milestones and six-monthly reporting. It is an accountability amendment.

Miss Nuttall's motion rightly focuses on human rights and opposition to cuts. The wording that I am very supportive of is that "no Canberrans loses supports before

equivalent services are fully operational”. Having that embedded within my amendment is in harmony with what Miss Nuttall is calling for. I do not see any contradiction in the amendment to Miss Nuttall’s motion that has been circulated in my name. Obviously, we will listen carefully to Ms Orr’s presentation and the reasoning for the amendments that she has circulated. I look forward to speaking further in this debate.

**MS ORR** (Yerrabi—Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, Minister for Climate Change, Environment, Energy and Water, Minister for Disability, Carers and Community Services and Minister for Seniors and Veterans) (5.46), by leave: I move:

1. Omit paragraph (1)(a), substitute:

“(a) modelling by Treasury on 27 May projects 241,000 participants cut from the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) by mid-2031, despite the Federal Minister for Health and Ageing, the Hon Mark Butler MP, announcing on 22 April that at least 160,000 participants would be cut by the end of the decade;”.

2. Omit paragraph (2), substitute:

“(2) calls on the ACT Government to:

- (a) advocate for a strong, fair and sustainable NDIS that maintains essential supports for participants, ensuring that no changes are made where viable and appropriate alternatives are not in place;
- (b) publicly oppose all elements of the NDIS Bill 2026 that would erode state and territory Ministers’ role in the shared governance of the scheme; and
- (c) recognise the importance of genuine consultation by supporting processes that allow sufficient time and opportunity for engagement, and, wherever possible, actively seek and incorporate the views of people with disability in the ACT, including through inclusive consultation timeframes, transparent inquiry processes, and the involvement of Disabled Persons Organisations (DPOs) before agreeing to proposed changes;”.

3. In paragraph (3), omit “Minister”, substitute “Member of the Legislative Assembly”.

4. In paragraph (3), after “Convention of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities”, insert “and the principles embedded in the Disability Inclusion Act 2024;”.

5. Insert after paragraph (3):

“(4) calls on the Federal Government to extend the public consultation time for the National Disability Insurance Scheme Amendment (Securing the NDIS for Future Generations) Bill 2026;

(5) in passing this motion acknowledges they are providing support for the intent of creating an eco-system of supports outside the NDIS and reforming the NDIS to align with its original intent providing individually tailored supports to people with permanent and significant disabilities;

(6) requests the Speaker of the Legislative Assembly write to the leaders of each Federal Parliamentary Party as well as Independent Members noting the views as expressed by the Legislative Assembly in this

resolution and calling on them and their respective parties to support the ACT Government in upholding this resolution; and

- (7) calls on relevant parties to report back as appropriate on these actions by 15 September 2026 outlining its engagement with the Commonwealth on the proposed legislation, including how stakeholder perspectives have informed its approach.”.

I have circulated these amendments in my name, when it comes to considering this motion. Certainly, having regard to the intent of Miss Nuttall’s motion, I understand that the outcome she is seeking is to make sure that Canberrans with disabilities continue to have supports to live their daily life and go about their life in a way that is inclusive within our community. It is fair to say that that is certainly an outcome, an ambition and intention shared by the ACT government.

The reason why I have put forward amendments to Miss Nuttall’s motion relates to the level of prescriptiveness within the motion and, in particular, the practicalities of the second part, which calls for public opposition and the use of rules until certain thresholds have been met. I have a genuine concern. It is not politically motivated; it is motivated by wanting to represent the ACT as best I can, within my role as the disability minister, and in the forums that that provides, including the disability ministers council.

Having read Miss Nuttall’s motion, the concern that I pick up, in saying that I should oppose any changes, and use the rules to oppose those changes, until such time as Foundational Supports are completely rolled out within the ACT, is that it is not practical, and it undermines my ability to represent the ACT at the DRMC table.

Foundational Supports—in regard to which Thriving Kids has been agreed; other Foundational Supports have not yet been endorsed by national cabinet—will be progressively rolled out over time, which is what I have said consistently in this place, in all the updates that I have provided. While Mr Cain might question levels of preparedness and whatnot, certainly, all the information has been shared with him. The timelines are there. They are agreed by all states and territories, with the federal government. In looking at building upon the service system that we have, in scaling up and expanding that, I am confident that we can progressively roll out Foundational Supports in the timelines that we have committed to.

I am less confident that I can do that when I have to sit at the table that allows me to negotiate how we will be doing that and oppose what it is that I am there to negotiate to do, which is what Miss Nuttall’s motion, in practice, seeks for me to do.

In looking at how I would represent the interests of the ACT community at the DRMC table, I do not feel that it is helpful to be limited to one tactic, which is opposing rules in order to say, “Until I get my way, that’s it.” The NDIS is a shared scheme between state and territory ministers and the federal government. We must work in cooperation and in collaboration, in order to do that. If I go to DRMC and I am under the instruction of the Assembly to oppose what is put before me, DRMC cannot do what it is there to do. It cannot work collaboratively. It cannot work in such a way that allows for the shared governance of the scheme to be operationalised in practice.

When it comes to the rules, there are further considerations. Category A rules and

category B rules, which require the consent of states and territories before they can be implemented, have a 14-day consultation period. If you do not respond within 14 days, it is taken that you agree to the rule change. If you provide a “no” response and you cannot get a unanimous response at DRMC, it is escalated to first ministers.

I certainly have very genuine and significant concerns that, based on the will of the chamber, if I were instructed to go into these meetings and oppose anything put forward until such time as the thing I have been asked to develop is developed—which I cannot develop, because I am opposing it—I am actually undermining the functioning of DRMC. If I cannot agree to anything then DRMC cannot agree to anything, and we would be taken out of contention. I do not think that is, by any stretch of the imagination, a useful or constructive way to represent the interests of the ACT community. Once it goes to first ministers, the first ministers national cabinet consider the rules by majority. Even if the Chief Minister withholds his support, if everyone else agrees, it has been for nothing, and we have not been able to put in our position.

With those concerns, I have drafted amendments which seek to strike a balance when it comes to reflecting the very genuine concerns that sit at the core of this motion and, it is fair to say, the not dissimilar hopes and ambitions for the outcomes as a result of these changes. But it does so in a way that does not pre-empt what could happen and what could be the best response to that.

The amendments also cover off a range of other factors that go to noting the full complexity in which this decision has been made. It should be noted that the federal government are the ones that are responsible for this bill; it is not something that I get a say on. DRMC does not get a vote. The rules of the scheme do not cover whether this bill does or does not pass the federal parliament. That is decided by the members of that parliament.

Certainly, with the call-ons, I am happy to state that the federal government should extend the consultation time on the bill. I do not think you would find in any guideline that two weeks is an adequate amount of time for consultation. I also point out that all parties can play a role in this. It is not solely up to me to use rules to frustrate or prevent reforms from happening. There are many people in the federal parliament, including the federal opposition, who could vote on the bill in particular ways, or amend parts of the bill.

Mr Speaker, it leaves me to think about the conversations that I have had, in trying to find a way through on this which could work, when it comes to the things that we have in common, without frustrating the longer term efforts. It is frustrating to have been greeted with a response that has not provided any alternatives other than, “This is what we need to do.” Without giving away individual conversations, it has been put to me that this will help me when I am at the table. I have made it very clear that that is not my view. I ask the Assembly to take on board the view of the person who has to implement these things when it comes to how it could be effective, given that I am trying to get to a good outcome, and I have good intent in this regard.

I also pick up on some of the comments that Miss Nuttall made, in quoting me, about the impacts that the discussion around the reforms to the NDIS have had on the disability community, including the disability community here in the ACT. I have

quoted and shared their stories. I have done that not just to make hollow words, but to make sure that we remember, as we have these debates, the people that sit at the heart of them, and what it is that we are here to do; that is, to ensure that people within our community who have disability are supported to live full, active and inclusive lives.

That remains my focus. I am not just paying lip service to it, as has been suggested, because I will not come out and take binary positions to opposing or not opposing certain aspects of what is a very complex and very extensive reform proposal.

In fairness, this goes to the point that there are many ways to approach this matter. While some people might have a preference for a particular way, that does not mean that another one is any less or more valid, or that it is unable to achieve a good outcome.

I will foreshadow Mr Cain's amendment. While we will not be opposing it, with respect to having a road map, and while we can certainly do that, I would note again that there are some practicalities that will make it a little bit difficult. It is very hard to provide a road map for Foundational Supports that have not yet been agreed by national cabinet. We do not know what that agreement will look like. With Thriving Kids, where there is an agreement, we have provided as much information as we can on that. I already provide a six-monthly update to the Assembly on how that is progressing. However, if Mr Cain would like me to put that in a diagram, which we can call a road map, I can certainly live with that.

I will flag that, if my amendments today are unsuccessful, ACT Labor will be voting against the original motion—not because we do not support providing supports and making sure that our community has adequate supports to enable people with disabilities to lead full and inclusive lives, but because we do not agree with what we see as a hindrance, not a help, when it comes to the prescriptive nature of what Miss Nuttall has put forward.

Certainly, as a government, as we progress through this, and as the minister, as I sit at the DRMC table—which, again, is one of the best and strongest avenues we have for representing the people of the ACT in this discussion and in these reforms, as they progress—I will be doing everything I can to make sure their interests are best realised, within all the powers that I have, and without limitation on using those powers.

**MISS NUTTALL** (Brindabella) (5.59): I will speak briefly to Ms Orr's amendments and to Mr Cain's foreshadowed amendment, in order to avoid speaking too many times. I thank members for their contributions to the debate so far, and to Ms Orr and Mr Cain's offices in particular, for working with us on this motion. The ACT Greens support Mr Cain's amendment, and I thank him, and Ms Barry previously, for adding a road map to Foundational Supports as an accountability piece in this motion today. I think it fits well.

On the amendments moved by Minister Orr today, I have indicated to the minister that we may have been able to support most of the proposed amendments, which align with the intent of the motion. However, ultimately, we cannot support those amendments which water it down—specifically, the removal of the calls under paragraph (2) of the motion. I was hoping that the minister would consider moving these amendments separately, and I did ask, but that was not to be.

For the record, I absolutely think that the federal government should extend consultation on the NDIS bill. I think we are all in agreement that two weeks is way too short. We should engage with our federal counterparts. I certainly have, and Senator Jordon Steele-John is sticking up for people with a disability fiercely and consistently, and he is doing an excellent job.

I sincerely acknowledge the minister's fears that this will diminish the ACT government's negotiating power, and I want to reiterate publicly that that is not the intent of the motion. The intent is to strengthen their negotiating powers by urging them, with the Assembly's backing, to oppose any cuts that might harm people by removing access to their funding before things are in place. This is not about a dummy-spit or saying no to every single thing that comes across the Disability Reform Ministerial Council's desk. It is about saying no to any rule changes that would remove funding from participants' plans before Foundational Supports are in place. It is about opposing those specific measures that pull the rug out from under people before an alternative is in place.

I cannot imagine why we would not use our territory powers and exercise them to stop that happening. With the corollary, if we do not, are we really going to make concessions or cut people's plans sometimes in order to win victories elsewhere? How do we tell our constituents that? It will not reassure them. If the minister has to point to us and say that it is her darned territory colleagues' fault that she cannot agree to a proposed rule change that would harm participants, I am very happy to be one of the people providing that excuse.

I acknowledge that the minister has spoken about concerns relating to meetings that may impact her ability to have shared governance of Foundational Supports. Ministers cannot be afraid to oppose changes that blatantly put their constituents at risk and must raise it in the forum designed for that very purpose. The ACT will not be alone in opposing proposed changes to the NDIS before Foundational Supports are in place. In fact, Queensland has publicly opposed it—I am thinking of Thriving Kids—and New South Wales, Victoria, Tasmania, Western Australia and South Australia have all expressed strong concerns, much in line with the call in paragraph (2)(a) of our motion, so it should not be impossible.

We will be opposing the Labor government's amendments.

**MR BARR** (Kurrajong—Chief Minister, Minister for Economic Development and Minister for Tourism and Trade) (6.03): Firstly, I thank Miss Nuttall for bringing this motion before the Assembly, and I welcome the amendments that Minister Orr has moved. They do go some way to sharpening the focus on what is most important here—that is, protecting people with disability, while ensuring that the National Disability Insurance Scheme remains strong, it remains fair and, most importantly, it remains sustainable.

At the outset, I want to acknowledge the concerns that are being raised by people with disability, their families, carers and advocates. These concerns are genuine and they reflect real uncertainty. They do deserve to be heard and taken seriously. My Labor colleagues' position is clear: we support a strong NDIS—one that continues to provide

essential, individually tailored supports to people with permanent and significant disability. That was the original intent of the scheme, and it must remain its guiding principle.

We also recognise that the scheme must be sustainable to endure. Supporting the NDIS means not only defending it but also improving it—ensuring that it is equitable, consistent and capable of meeting the needs of current and future participants. That is why Ms Orr’s amendments recognise that reform and development of a broader ecosystem of supports must go hand in hand. This is important.

Going to the first part of Ms Orr’s amendments, we strongly support advocating for a scheme that maintains essential supports and ensures that no changes are made where viable and appropriate alternatives are not in place. That is a critical principle and, as we work with the commonwealth, that is a principle that the territory government will continue to uphold.

On governance, Ms Orr’s amendments are also appropriately clear. The NDIS is a shared national scheme. States and territories must retain a meaningful role in its oversight and direction, and proposals that would override that shared governance warrant serious concern. The territory government will continue to advocate for a strong state and territory voice in the decision-making process, ensuring that the interests of our community are represented.

Consultation is another area where we can find common ground. Reform of this scale cannot be done “to” people; it must be done “with” them. The amendments rightly emphasise the need for a genuine consultation process that does allow sufficient time for opportunity and engagement. That includes a transparent inquiry process and the meaningful involvement of disability advocacy organisations. We support that approach. The lived experience of people with disability is essential to getting this right, and we will continue to advocate for processes that reflect that.

Ms Orr’s amendments also call for the extension of the commonwealth consultation period, and that is a reasonable request, given the significance of the proposed changes. It is appropriate that stakeholders have adequate time to consider and to respond. Importantly, Ms Orr’s amendments also acknowledge that reform is not solely about the NDIS itself. It is about creating a broader ecosystem of supports—foundational supports in education, health, community services and beyond. These supports are essential for ensuring that people with disability can access the services they need, whether or not they are NDIS participants.

The territory government is already contributing to this work through co-design processes and ongoing engagement with the community. We recognise that more will need to be done here, but this work must continue in partnership with the other states and territories and the commonwealth.

I also note the call for all members of this Assembly to reaffirm their commitment to human rights, including the Human Rights Act 2004, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, and the principles embedded in the Disability Inclusion Act 2024. That is something we should all be able to support. These frameworks are, of course, not symbolic. They shape how we design policy, how we

deliver services and how we measure success. They remind us that people are at the centre of this debate—their dignity, their autonomy and their right to participate fully in society.

Ms Orr's amendments call for the Speaker to write to federal political leaders and for reporting back by September. This transparency and accountability in the process is important. It is important to keep the Assembly and the community informed about how these issues are being progressed, and Ms Orr's amendments do this. This is not simply a policy question. It is a question that requires careful and constructive engagement across governments and with the community. It is not one that benefits from over-simplification. It requires us to hold firmly to core principles of fairness, sustainability and respect for rights, whilst also working through a complex and absolutely necessary reform.

The NDIS, as it was operating, is not sustainable. There is almost universal agreement on that point. Something had to change, something needs to change, and that work needs to occur. The territory government will continue to be part of that work. We will advocate strongly for the interests of Canberrans. We will engage constructively with the commonwealth. We do know how to do that, and there is plenty of evidence to suggest that we can do that. Ms Orr's approach is, in our view—the people who actually have to do this work—the best way forward.

We need to ensure that the voices of people with disability remain central to the conversation. We also need to be able to engage in this process in all of its different stages and iterations, in all of the different fora, in a productive and flexible way. That is what Ms Orr's amendments are seeking. It is in that spirit that the amendments have been put forward. I commend them to the Assembly as a practical way forward on this issue to get the outcomes that I believe the Assembly is looking for.

The alternative places a range of restrictions on the minister, perhaps only by way of direction. I am sure, as the minister has pointed out, that her flexibility, and the way this system and this process will work, will be greatly enhanced if these amendments are supported and the government can get on with that work.

Whilst I appreciate the intent of Miss Nuttall's motion, it does stray somewhat from the pathway to the best outcome here. I think the minister has put forward the case. The amendments are worthy of the Assembly's support, and I commend them to the Assembly.

**MS TOUGH** (Brindabella) (6.11): I did not intend to speak on this motion this evening. I recognise the late hour, but I had to get up and speak. I do not know how many people in this room have firsthand experience with the NDIS, but I do. It is something that my family has been engaged with for over 12 months, in trying to get on the system, in accessing the system, in getting assessments for the system, getting reimbursed from the system, trying to self-manage a plan on the system, and engaging therapies through it. It is not an easy system to use, and it is something that my family has struggled with. This is why I was not going to speak, but I had to get it on the record.

I do not particularly like talking publicly about this aspect of my family, because I do value my family's right to privacy. In this job our families do not have the best privacy

in general, but I want to put on the record that I have firsthand engagement with the NDIS. I self-manage a plan on the NDIS for a family member, and that family member does not have a very life-limiting disability. That family member is pretty incredible in his life, but he has developmental delays; he has multiple. It is really important for my family for him to have access to the NDIS and to get his therapies multiple times a week.

I have taken a pair from here before, on a sitting day, to attend therapy. I have left committee meetings early to get to therapy. I have driven all over Canberra. My husband drives all over Canberra, too, because we could not get a therapy close to home.

I wanted to put my voice on the record for this motion. I genuinely appreciate where you are coming from, Miss Nuttall. This system is so important. It is such an important system, but it is not sustainable in its current way. The amount of hoops we had to jump through, the amount of steps there are to get even basic assistance, are insane, so it does need looking at, and it does need changing.

I trust the minister and the Chief Minister, in that we need all the tools we have to negotiate with other states and territories, and federally, to make sure that we get the best outcome from the system. I genuinely appreciate, in Minister Orr's amendments, extending the time for the Senate inquiry. I have not engaged with that inquiry. I participate in enough committee inquiries in this place, without engaging in another inquiry in another parliament. But I do not want the minister to be hamstrung at the negotiating table, because we need to get this right. We really need to get this right.

My family member was really lucky; he is now on the NDIS and getting those early supports. Whether we get kicked off or not, I do not know, but I know he has been able to get early supports, and it is going to be absolutely life-changing. I trust there will be Foundational Supports there, if supports are still needed. I do not want families coming after us to not have proper support in place.

That is why I completely back the minister's amendments, to give us all the chances we have in negotiating, in trying to extend the time of the inquiry, and for everyone in this place to reaffirm our commitment to the human rights of people with a disability. The participants in the NDIS are people, just like us. They are just trying to live their lives and get the support they need to do that, every day.

I have spoken for longer than I planned. Thank you, Miss Nuttall, for moving this motion. I know where you are coming from, and I appreciate it. I want to put my support 100 per cent behind Minister Orr's amendments.

**MS CLAY** (Ginninderra) (6.16): People are scared. People with disabilities are scared. Their families are scared. They do not know what is coming next. These cuts have been announced. There are no details. People are trying to get the details. Only today, we asked ACT government for the details regarding when we will find out about Thriving Kids and Foundational Supports. We do not know. We have a budget today, and we do not know. That is not in there. People are really worried about this.

This issue could be very complex, but it could also be really simple. Miss Nuttall has moved this really good motion today, and the elements of it that the ACT Labor

government cannot bring themselves to agree with are to publicly oppose cuts to the NDIS until we have the ACT supports in place, and to publicly oppose those cuts in rules until we have the supports in place. We are not saying, “Don’t change NDIS, ever.” We are saying, “Please use the power that you have to protect your people. Your people are scared. They are really scared right now, and they want you to use your voice and use the power that you have to make sure that you are looking after them, and to make sure that we will not see NDIS federal cuts with no supports in place for our people.”

Right now, we do not have any information or knowledge. People with disabilities and their families do not have any information or knowledge. If the Foundational Supports are here, that is fine. We could pass this motion, and effectively it would not change any negotiations because it would just reaffirm the negotiations that are already in place. We know that some states are doing this. They are doing this because they are scared for their people. We know that, if the federal government need to raise funds, they can do it. The Greens have views on whether we should be spending hundreds of billions of dollars on submarines that we will probably never see, or whether we should be investing in our people instead, and whether we should be allowing our gas resources to be exported overseas, or whether we should be taxing those.

That is one way that our federal government could raise the funds that we need to provide the services that our people are desperately in need of. There are probably lots of ways around that problem. We are asking the government to look after the people of the ACT, and just stand up and say, “No, we will not allow these cuts. We will publicly speak against it and use any powers that we have in the regulations to make sure that those cuts don’t go ahead until the Foundational Supports are in place.” It is really simple.

**MR EMERSON** (Kurrajong) (6.19): I will be supporting the amendments from the minister. Like other speakers, I want to thank Miss Nuttall for bringing this matter to the Assembly today. I think she is right to bring it to the Assembly. It is important that we have this debate and that we call on the government to be clearer and stronger in its advocacy in relation to the level of support that is being provided for people with a disability in our community—importantly, in relation to this process, which really has been such a failure in the way it has unfolded, with the federal government holding the states and territories over a barrel in relation to health funding and dragging out this entire process, not really having things ready, making announcements, and then states and territories have to figure out what the announcements actually mean and what the plan will be. It has been far from ideal. Stepping back, it is clear that the NDIS does need reform. I appreciate Ms Tough’s contributions because, from a personal perspective, she is making clear exactly why that is the case.

The current system forces people into the one service offering that is available. Something like foundational supports were intended to be part of the NDIS from the very early stages. This was identified as absolutely critical in a Productivity Commission report in 2011, before the NDIS was introduced. It was making sure that seeking and receiving a diagnosis and receiving the kind of specialised support provided through NDIS plans was not the only option, but it has been. That is why we are in the situation that we are in, because people are not able to get diagnoses in the time that they need them. Also, people who need the sort of support that will be provided by

foundational supports and perhaps do not need a diagnosis are pushed in that direction, whether it is by GPs, by family or by friends, because that is the only option. It does not make sense. It is clear that reform is required.

What is equally clear—it is clear to everyone in this Assembly and also to people in our community who are affected by these decisions—is that the way the reform has been carried out has been abysmal. Miss Nuttall is right to call for clarity and right to say that it is critical that the states and territories, including the ACT government, make clear that, as Miss Nuttall said, the rug will not be pulled out from underneath people before a new rug is in place.

Having said all of that, my office has been working with the minister's office and put forward some of the changes that we would expect if amendments were made. They have been incorporated into the minister's amendments, so I am happy with those changes. Regarding the point I have just made about Miss Nuttall's point, the critical call in the proposed amendments put forward by the minister is that "no changes are made where viable and appropriate alternatives are not in place". That is what we really want. That is what people with disability in our community have been really clear with a lot of us on. I am keen to support that call.

I do not think the calls in the original motion for public opposition from the minister, the Treasurer and the Chief Minister "until foundational supports for all adults and children in the ACT are fully funded, operational and embedded in communities" is realistic, unfortunately. This is a staged transition. Changes will be occurring in a staged way. It is absolutely critical that the appropriate supports are in place at each stage in that journey before the existing supports are removed, but it is not realistic for all supports that would be in place as part of this new system are fully funded, operational and embedded in communities before any changes are made. That is the part of Miss Nuttall's original motion that I have an issue with. I am trying to find a sensible way forward that addresses the issues and respects the really justified concerns of people in our community who are affected by this—their fears and the level of uncertainty. I have heard about this and I think we have all heard about this, but it needs to be done in a way that actually produces the outcomes that we all seek and we all hope to have implemented by the ACT government in consultation with the federal government. I am happy with the replacement calls proposed by the minister.

Having said all of that, I am also very happy that Mr Cain brought forward his amendment calling for a detailed implementation road map. I note again that it involves rollout timelines, indicating this is a staged process. It is critical that we, in this Assembly, are kept updated throughout that process and that people in our community are kept updated throughout that process, as multiple committee reports delivered to and by this Assembly have called for during this term of government. I am really pleased with that amendment and I am pleased with the minister's amendment. I will be happy to support it. I am not quite sure how I will vote if it goes down, but the reality is that I am really supportive of the sentiment that is brought forward by Miss Nuttall's motion. Again, I thank her for bringing it forward.

**MR CAIN** (Ginninderra) (6.24): Regarding Ms Orr's amendments, she has obviously gone all or nothing. There might have been some opportunity for stepping through her five amendments, but that is not to be the case this this afternoon. We will be opposing

Ms Orr's amendments.

**MS CARRICK** (Murrumbidgee) (6.24): I appreciate Miss Nuttall's motion because we all want to see foundational supports ready for when people come off the NDIS. It is really important. Last month, I joined Mr Emerson and Mr Pocock in a town hall in Hughes. We heard directly from people with lived experience: families, carers and service providers. What they shared was clear: there is a deep concern, distress and uncertainty about these reforms. Advocates have warned that removing people from the NDIS would leave some vulnerable to harm and that, when support is reduced or removed, responsibility does not disappear; it shifts to the ACT.

Right now, our system is under strain. Many community organisations are facing rising demand, increasing costs, workforce shortages and funding uncertainty. Families are navigating fragmented systems just to access basic support. That is why this motion is so important. We need to see a clear plan. We need to see full mapping of the services we currently have, a clear understanding of the services we will need, identification of the gaps that must be addressed, and a transparent implementation plan for how those gaps will be filled.

We must ensure that the services already being developed, including Thriving Kids and Strong Foundations—and we have the maternal and child health services—are all properly integrated with existing services and are not operating in silos. If we do not get that integration right, we risk building a system that is fragmented, difficult to navigate and ultimately ineffective. There are also serious implications for the territory. Stepping into the gap left by the NDIS will place significant pressure on the ACT budget and on our health system, particularly with the risk of increased hospital demand and delayed discharges. That is not just a disability policy issue; it is also a whole system issue. People living with disability deserve clarity about what these reforms mean for them. They deserve certainty that support will be there when they need it. Foundational supports are not optional; they are essential. We need to see supports in place and I am concerned they will not be.

The NDIS needs reform, and I expect the ACT government to work with the commonwealth to ensure the framework is in place, to design the ACT services that we need and to develop an implementation plan. The delivery of foundational supports will be an ongoing issue. I support the government advocating for Canberrans and ensuring great support is in place as the NDIS transitions. Supports need to be in place as they are needed. I and the rest of the Assembly will be asking questions to ensure that implementation progresses as needed by our community. I also support Mr Cain's amendment for a detailed implementation road map.

Question put:

That **Ms Orr's** amendment be agreed to.

The Assembly voted—

Ayes 10

Noes 9

Yvette Berry  
Fiona Carrick

Marisa Paterson  
Michael Pettersson

Chiaka Barry  
Andrew Braddock

Laura Nuttall  
Mark Parton

Leanne Castley  
Tara Cheyne  
Thomas Emerson  
Suzanne Orr

Caitlin Tough  
Taimus Werner-Gibbings

Peter Cain  
Jo Clay  
Jeremy Hanson  
James Milligan

Rebecca Vassarotti

Question resolved in the affirmative.

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

*At 6.30 pm, in accordance with standing order 34, the debate was interrupted. The motion for the adjournment of the Assembly having been put and negatived, the debate was resumed.*

**MR CAIN** (Ginninderra) (6.32): I move:

After all text in paragraph (2)(c), insert:

- “(d) publicly release, by 1 September 2026, a detailed implementation roadmap for foundational supports and Thriving Kids, including rollout timelines, workforce and funding requirements, service gaps, transition safeguards, and six-monthly reporting to the Assembly to ensure no Canberrans loses supports before equivalent services are fully operational.”.

**Mr Cain's** amendment agreed to.

**MISS NUTTALL** (Brindabella) (6.33): I thank Mr Cain, Minister Orr, Chief Minister Barr, Ms Tough, Ms Clay, Mr Emerson and Ms Carrick for their debate contributions today. I particularly thank Mr Cain and Minister Orr's offices for the opportunity to sit down and talk about this motion. The intent of today was to bind the ACT Labor government to the strongest form of words in order to protect people with a disability in their community and re-assure those who are scared. While I do not think we have landed on the strongest form of words today and while I am disappointed that we could not get a firmer commitment from the Labor government, it would be a disservice to people with a disability who have given their time and energy to not support any improvement to the status quo.

We have managed to get the government to agree to ensure that no changes will be made where viable and appropriate alternatives are not in place. We have managed to get the government to agree to publicly oppose parts of the NDIS bill that would erode state and territory ministers' powers. I am nervous that the reassurance that ministers would use their territory powers to protect people from the cuts was only given verbally, but it was given, and we will absolutely hold the ministers to that.

There is always more to say—not at 6.34 pm—and no doubt the NDIS bill hearings happening over the course of the week will bring new revelations, new perspectives and new concerns about the harm this bill will cause to people with a disability, both here in Canberra and all across Australia. That is far too much detail to cover in an hour-long debate, but I hope this motion has progressed the conversation on the ACT's role in NDIS cuts and how we should go in to bat for our constituents.

Too often reforms are done about people with a disability but without them. I do not want our motion to be one of those. I am incredibly grateful to the folk who have given their time and energy, under significant time constraints, to contribute to and review this motion. I hate plagiarism, and I am caught between crediting them directly and safeguarding against the risk of reprisal. I give my sincere thanks to the Protect our NDIS movement here in Canberra—I would encourage you all to go to their rally this Saturday at 2 pm in Garema Place—and to those who took the time to share their story directly with me and my colleagues over the last few weeks. Organising is ever-more challenging and costly when it puts your wellbeing at risk, and, for a lot of people with a disability, it does. Their words and consultation have been worth their weight in gold. I thank and acknowledge my former colleague, and always my friend, the former Greens minister for disability Emma Davidson for her moxie, wisdom, heart and staunch allyship with people with a disability here in Canberra.

I thank Ajay, whom I had a great chat with at the last rally. I would like to share their words in this place, to be heard not just by the minister for disability but also by every minister who is accountable to them. I appreciate that a lot of them are sticking around in the chamber. Ajay's said, "The proposed changes to the NDIS will make ACT's hospitals even more busy than they already are, because a lot of the respite and supports NDIS participants rely on keep them out of hospitals. Personally, for people like me with multiple issues—10-plus disabilities as well as level 2 AuDHD—I worry about my future under the changes, as, with only five hours of social support, I'm quite isolated already and the changes threaten to make that even worse. I worry what impact the changes will have on carers. They are under so much pressure already."

Ajay's points speak to the fact that people with a disability are not the sole responsibility of the minister for disability. Certainly, they should be a very powerful advocate, but the minister for housing needs to demand commonwealth funding for accessibility improvements in public housing or our public housing will not be safe to live in. The Minister for Health needs to demand commonwealth funding for community mental health programs, like safe havens and social support programs, or we are going to see increased presentations for mental health crises at our emergency departments. The minister for education needs to demand the commonwealth helps fund learning support and teaching assistance or everyone in the school system will continue to burn out. The Minister for Transport needs to demand commonwealth funding to upgrade our public transport system and community transport options for people with a disability or they will lose access to their community.

I think people assume that people with a disability and people within the disability policy space "have it covered". That is a very dangerous way of thinking, because we all have a moral obligation to look after each other, and too often it is people who do not have a disability making policy decisions on behalf of those who do. We cannot afford to let this issue be relegated to a niche. The consequences of this NDIS bill are far too serious and far-reaching to assume they will sort themselves out. Our collective obligation as decision-makers is to listen to people with a disability, and not just when they have to shout at the top of their lungs because we have got it wrong; we need to design things with them in the first place.

We need ACT Labor government ministers to throw everything but the kitchen sink at this bill. We need them to back people with a disability and we need them to do it loudly

and now. If they go in to bat for people with a disability, we will back them—a majority of this Assembly will back them. I commend my motion to the Assembly.

Original question, as amended, resolved in the affirmative.

## Adjournment

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

That the Assembly do now adjourn.

## Legislative Assembly—ministerial responsibilities

**MR CAIN** (Ginninderra) (6.39): I will make reference to a short speech I made a month ago, in the first sitting week in May, because it produced an interesting response from Minister Cheyne. Mr Speaker, I will give you the background; I will go into the detail of what transpired between her office and mine.

Early in May, I gave a speech during 90-second statements and expressed surprise regarding a response to a ministerial of mine about non-working streetlights that a constituent had brought to my attention. I expressed surprise that a staffer had responded to my ministerial to Minister Cheyne, let alone the content of the response, which was, “We’ve got a resource challenge with fixing streetlights.”

Putting that part of it aside, I commented that, ordinarily, one would expect that a ministerial on one’s letterhead to a minister would receive a ministerial response. The minister wrote to me by email on 8 May, at 12.17 in the afternoon—which was, obviously, the day after the three days of sittings—and she basically challenged me about my speech. She also touched on how she would deal with my office and gave me an ultimatum. I will read out her ultimatum:

To avoid any doubt, my office will pause responding to any outstanding or further correspondence from you until you indicate in writing which of the following arrangements you prefer. (1) continue receiving responses from time to time from my office where appropriate, including from staff acting on my authority, as applies to every other member. This does not preclude and has never precluded ministerial responses on letterhead where I or my office determine this to be appropriate. Or (2) receive all correspondences by ministerial letter under my signature. Routed through full direct clearance, these will be substantially identical but materially slower.

The minister concluded:

Until you nominate a preference, all correspondence received from your office will be held on file.

I responded that same day, 8 May. I said:

Tara, it is my understanding that when a minister responds to a direct communication from another parliamentarian, it is done so under the minister’s signature. As you would be aware, these responses are usually provided to the

relevant originator of the issue, usually a resident or organisation, and that they are sometimes shared on social media. However, if the response is from a minister's staffer, then such sharing exposes the name and contact details of that staffer, something that may expose them to harassment, either by email, social media or at worst in person. I say this from a place of care. How you choose to respond to my direct communications in the future is entirely a matter for you.

I have not received a response to that email of 8 May. The last response I received from Minister Cheyne's office was on 8 May. That is the last time I have had a response from her. My count at the moment is that there are 14 unanswered queries to her office from me—14—and that, following an ultimatum that unless I tell her how to respond, she will not correspond with me. I think this is a serious breach of a minister's responsibilities to a fellow parliamentarian, and shame on the minister for laughing at this scenario—residents coming to me and asking me to act on something, and I write to the minister and she refuses to answer.

### **Personal explanation**

**MS CHEYNE** (Ginninderra—Manager of Government Business, Attorney-General, Minister for Human Rights, Minister for City and Government Services and Minister for the Night-Time Economy) (6.44): Under standing order 46, I have been misrepresented. I would like to correct the record.

**MR SPEAKER:** Leave is granted.

**MS CHEYNE:** That is, frankly, extraordinary. With respect to Mr Cain's response to me, I took it to be complete; that is, if he was going to be careless with communications from my staff then he was indicating that he wants it on letterhead. I have signed several letters to Mr Cain. It is not as if he has not received any correspondence from my office; he has. He should reflect that continuing to reflect on my office and on correspondence is quite extraordinary. Perhaps he could reflect on the reason that I responded in the way I did in the first place.

It is not as if I am not responding, Mr Speaker. He wants it on letterhead; he is getting it on letterhead. He should have received it on letterhead. If he cannot see that that has come through yet, or it has not been sent through via the directorate yet, that is unfortunate, but I know that I have signed several, including in the last few days.

### **Kurrajong electorate**

**MS VASSAROTTI** (Kurrajong) (6.46): Standing here today, I feel an overwhelming sense of gratitude in standing here again, in this place, on beautiful and unceded Ngunnawal country, and to be entrusted once again with the responsibility of serving the people of Canberra. It is a privilege that never loses its way. It is humbling, grounding and deeply personal.

Over the last 18 months, I stepped outside this chamber and into the heart of the community in quite a different way. I have been so lucky to work within a large human services organisation, one that supports people navigating some of the most complex systems in our country—disability, aged care, early childhood education and family preservation. I have immersed myself deeply in First Nations issues, having the

privilege to learn from many incredible Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leaders.

I joined a community housing board working to change the story about the failure of our housing system to provide safe and affordable homes for all. I continue to invest time in causes that I care deeply about—reducing gambling harm, making sure people have access to a warm meal and a kind word, and continuing to connect with many of the great local people and organisations caring for people in our community.

It has been a period of significant learning. It has been a period where I have been able to connect deeply and authentically. It has been a gift that will profoundly shape the next part of my journey.

I return to this chamber with a renewed appreciation for the people who hold our community together—the carers, the educators, the support workers, the advocates and the families. They are the backbone of our social fabric. They deserve systems that honour their work rather than exhaust it.

I also return with an even deeper understanding of what it means to lead with humility. In the human services sector, you quickly learn that there is no single organisation, no single leader, and certainly no single politician that can solve complex problems alone. Real change happens when people come together, when we collaborate, when we recognise that the wisdom we need is often held by those closest to the issue.

Now, more than ever, as Canberrans—in fact, Australians—are turning away from our institutions of governance, this is not just a view of how we work; it is truly the only way we are going to do it that will rebuild trust in our community, give a sense of agency and build consent for the way we govern again.

This is the spirit that I bring back to this Assembly. I am committed to working in a way that centres people and relationships, a way that recognises that trust is not something that is given once; it is something that we earn over and over again through our actions.

I am also returning with a renewed sense of purpose. My time back in the sector has reminded me that the challenges we face—whether it be in care, housing, climate or community—are all interconnected. They require us to think systemically, to act courageously and to keep people at the centre of every decision. They require us to work alongside our community, to see just how universally we can deliver the services that make life better for everyone.

They require us to build new services for our community, in the spirit of things like Medicare. Now, more than ever, we need to build on that legacy. We need more Medicares. We need that same bold, universal approach to fixing housing, to fixing child care, to fixing public transport. We will only do this by building the community consensus needed to take that next step, to design systems that truly work for everyday, working Canberrans.

Most of all, I return with gratitude—gratitude for the community that continues to believe in the possibility of a fairer, kinder Canberra. It is an honour to serve this community again.

**Emergency Services—Thank a First Responder Day  
Multicultural affairs—events**

**MR BRADDOCK** (Yerrabi) (6.50): Firstly, I would like to recognise that today is Thank a First Responder Day. These people, whilst we are tucked up safely in the warmth of our beds, are the ones who are out there in the cold, in the streets, responding to the community, often encountering Canberrans on their worst days. I would like to extend my thanks to all our first responders for the service they provide, on behalf of our community.

I would also like to recognise that last weekend was the Canberra Multicultural Community Forum Gala Ball, recognising over 21 years that this organisation has been in place in the ACT, representing over 100 different multicultural community groups. They have provided a valuable service advocating for the multicultural community, and that is appreciated widely.

It was a fantastic opportunity to join fellow MLAs like Ms Tough, Mr Cain and Ms Barry at that ball to help celebrate their magnificent achievement with them and wish them all the best in the future. I hope they will continue to serve the Canberra community as they have done over the past 21 years. To Chin Wong, Sam Wong and so many others within the Canberra Multicultural Community Forum, thank you for all your good work, and we appreciate your effort.

I would also like to acknowledge the African-Australian ACT community. They came together about two weeks ago and had a fantastic celebration of Africa Day and the value that the African diaspora has in the ACT community. Again, it was a fantastic opportunity to catch up with friends in the community as they celebrated their culture. They had a magnificent display of dancing, ethnic dress and food. It was a privilege to be able to share in such a community event with them.

That is part of the great privilege we have as members of this place. We do get so many invites to share these opportunities with the local community.

**Mr Cain:** We were there, too.

**MR BRADDOCK:** Mr Cain pointed that out yesterday. I would like to recognise that Mr Cain and Ms Barry were also there, and we appreciated your attendance as well, as they livened up the activities.

MLAs are not allowed to have favourite communities, but I will say again that the African community is definitely the most fun community that I know of in the Canberra community.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

**The Assembly adjourned at 6.53 pm.**