



DEBATES
OF THE
LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
FOR THE
AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

DAILY HANSARD

Edited proof transcript

20 October 2026

This is an **EDITED PROOF TRANSCRIPT** of proceedings that is subject to further checking. Members' suggested corrections for the official *Weekly Hansard* are requested to be lodged in writing with the Hansard office no later than **Monday, 10 November 2026**.

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Tuesday, 20 October 2026

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

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

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

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

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

Petitions

The following petitions were lodged for presentation:

Tuggeranong town centre—Anketell Street—petitions 34-26 and 96-26

By Ms Tough, from 103 and 122 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:

1. Anketell Street is home to a number of cafes, restaurants, and essential services on both sides of the street around the area of South.Point Shopping Centre and the Laneways.
2. Buses were removed from Anketell Street between Pitman Street and Reed Street North in 2019, which has vastly improved the amenity of the area.
3. While the speed limit on Anketell Street has been reduced to 20km for the raised section outside a large section of South.Point Shopping Centre, which is a shared zone, it can be confusing for traffic and pedestrians, with pedestrians forced to cross the road on the one crossing directly outside the front doors of South.Point or further away at the signalised intersections.
4. Removing cars from Anketell Street, where it is currently a shared zone, or the section between Pitman Street and Reed Street North, would significantly increase the amenity of the area, and link the South.Point Shopping Centre and its cafes and restaurants, with the Laneways and down to Lake Tuggeranong.
5. Community events and festivals like SouthFest demonstrate how vibrant Anketell Street and the Laneways can be. Removing cars will allow this to happen more frequently.

6. Acknowledges there are many restaurants along Anketell Street that rely on takeaway orders and require ease of access for delivery drivers and people collecting food, as well as the need for loading zones in the area.

Your petitioners, therefore, request the Assembly to:

1. Call on the ACT Government to engage with the community and surrounding businesses about the future of Anketell Street, including closing a section to traffic to create a more connected and vibrant Tuggeranong Town Centre.

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

Motion to take note of petitions

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

That the petitions so lodged be noted.

Tuggeranong town centre—Anketell Street—petitions 34-26 and 96-26

MS TOUGH (Brindabella—Minister for Human Rights, Minister for Community Services, Minister for Corrections, Minister for Women, Seniors and Veterans, and Minister for the Prevention of Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence) (10.01): I seek leave to table an out-of-order copy of the Anketell Street petition.

Leave granted.

MS TOUGH: I table:

Petition which does not conform with the standing orders—Tuggeranong Town Centre—Anketell Street revitalisation—Ms Tough (172 signatures)

I rise today to speak in support of the petition to revitalise Anketell Street. I thank Frank and Sandra for bringing this petition and for the support of many businesses in Tuggeranong, particularly in South Point. Frank and Sandra are frequent, if not daily, patrons of Brew Bar on Anketell Street, a fabulous local cafe that all of us in Tuggeranong know very well. While they enjoy their daily coffee, they often witness near misses on the road outside Brew Bar, where people are crossing on the raised area of the road but not at the crossing or the traffic lights at each end and cars frequently doing U-turns along Anketell Street and speeding through the area.

As most people in this chamber would be aware, Anketell Street was done up in 2019—and it looks absolutely fabulous compared to what it was before then—and buses were removed from the street, which has made people's daily coffee in the outdoor dining area a really wonderful experience without those loud buses going through. But it could be better, and I support Frank and Sandra's vision to make it an even better place.

When I am talking to people or just talking to Minister Petterson about the idea of moving cars from Anketell Street or changing it to prioritise pedestrians, like Bunda

Street in Civic or a bit more like Hibberson Street in Gungahlin, there has been a really positive reaction from members of the community, who can see the vision of having more events like SouthFest—which is an incredible local festival run by the Tuggeranong Community Centre each year—and more community events in Anketell Street and places for pedestrians, for people, to come together and gather in a really positive way without worrying about cars and traffic.

There have also been some concerns raised about accessibility issues from the idea of closing Anketell Street with the nearby health centre and GP clinic, and further food delivery and pick-ups from the cafes and restaurants. I think this is really important feedback that should be taken into account if there are to be any changes made on Anketell Street, whether that is closing it or changing it to a pedestrian priority, so that we can still have those accessibility requirements and so the cafes and restaurants still have that ability to get deliveries and to do a roaring trade on takeaway like we know so many of those restaurants do every day.

I also thank South Point Shopping Centre for their support of this petition. When they heard about Frank and Sandra's idea, they jumped on board because they can obviously see the benefits to the community and having more community festivals and activations outside the shopping centre on Anketell Street bringing people closer together.

By closing Anketell Street or changing it to a more pedestrian friendly area, we have the opportunity to really revitalise the town centre and to build on those changes made in 2019. I really look forward to seeing this vision come to fruition one day. So thank you everyone in the community who signed the petition. I commend it to the Assembly.

MR PARTON (Brindabella—Leader of the Opposition) (10.05): There is a delicate balance here, and I think it is pretty clear—and I think that Ms Tough would even likely agree with me privately—that we did not quite get the balance right with the so-called revamp of Anketell Street some years ago. Coffs Harbour has the Big Banana—I do not even know where the Big Prawn is—but we have now got the “big speed hump”.

Mr Emerson: Ballina.

MR PARTON: Ballina, of course. I played footy in Ballina. Anyway, we now have the big speed hump, which has created a situation where a lot of the pedestrians are not fully aware of who has right of way. I am sure it has been expressed to all members of Brindabella that there are many who are not familiar to the area who assume that, because we have the big speed hump there, it is the same scenario as Bunda Street—and it is not, and it is one of the things that creates a fair bit of angst.

If you remove cars from Anketell Street, of course, it is going to improve the walkability of the area—and I can understand the arguments that it would revitalise the precinct—but, as has been pointed out by Ms Tough, there are several takeaway shops, businesses and health services that require ease of access for delivery drivers and appropriate loading zones but also for people to park on the street, where it is possible.

I welcome the proposed engagement with business regarding the future of the Anketell Street area, but I cannot help but think that this is just another petition from a government member calling on the government to do the things that the government

should normally be doing.

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS (Brindabella) (10.07): I very briefly rise to speak in support of Ms Tough's petition and to say thank you very much for the work that she has done with constituents to bring this to the Assembly. Anketell Street, compared to when I first campaigned along it in 2016, is completely different and a much better place. The points that Mr Parton raised about the confusion regarding rights of way, I think, are valid. Actually, during the 2020 campaign there was a car accident that most of us witnessed between a pedestrian and a vehicle.

A bit more thinking about how Anketell Street can be made safer and more accessible and then to take it to the next level will be extremely important, because there is going to be more foot traffic on Anketell Street. As more and more people are moving into apartments and as more apartments are built in the vicinity, more foot traffic, more people, will be coming along Anketell Street—and that is going to be a good thing. Anketell Street is never going to be Bunda Street. There are areas along it that have really important and significant health services in those buildings, and they need to remain. But I actually think there is no high street in Canberra like Anketell Street in terms of where it is situated and what vistas it has. It is 150 metres from Lake Tuggeranong. It is 1.5 kilometres from the Murrumbidgee River. It is bookended by the Tuggeranong Town Park on the north and then by extraordinary vistas of Mt Tennant from the Brindabellas looking south.

The work that Ms Tough has done to bring a vision to the Assembly for the government to start thinking seriously about what is next for Anketell Street to make it more convivial, more social and safer is extremely important. So I thank her again and the petitioners for bringing that to the Assembly.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Burrangiri Aged Care Respite Centre—update Ministerial statement

MS STEPHEN-SMITH (Kurrajong—Deputy Chief Minister, Minister for Education, Minister for Child Development and Wellbeing, Minister for Finance, Minister for the Public Service, and Minister for Health Infrastructure) (10.09): I am pleased to rise today to provide a further update on the ACT government's work to support aged-care respite services in the territory and to report on progress against the Assembly resolution of 26 March 2026 concerning the future of the Burrangiri Aged Care Respite Centre.

As members may be aware, I tabled a ministerial statement in the last sitting to meet the timing requirement of the Assembly's motion. However, I am now able to confirm the outcome of the work we have been doing with the commonwealth government, which has secured the long-term future of Burrangiri as a valued aged-care respite service. We have worked closely with Senator Gallagher, Minister Butler, Minister Rae and the commonwealth Department of Health, Disability and Aging to secure a commitment of \$10 million for capital infrastructure to maintain Burrangiri's 15 respite beds.

This funding will be provided to the ACT government through the Aged Care Capital Assistance Program to support infrastructure upgrades at Burrangiri, ensuring the facility meets contemporary safety and compliance standards. Works are expected to begin in the second half of 2027 and be completed in 2028. Due to the extensive nature of the works, Burrangiri will close on 30 June 2027, to allow these critical infrastructure upgrades to occur. The advice I have received from the directorate indicates the upgrades will take six to 12 months to complete.

The commonwealth's public announcement of its commitment on 13 October is great news for the territory, not only for the future of Burrangiri and the continuation of this highly-valued respite service but also in relation to its commitment to explore how respite services for older Canberrans can be expanded. In this regard, I want to address some of the comments made by other political parties and independent politicians, when the funding was announced. The first of these is that the Albanese Labor government had committed during the 2025 election to delivering "new beds". This is, strictly speaking, true—but context is important. At the time the commitment was made, the ACT government was intending to close Burrangiri as an aged-care respite facility. The announcement in April 2025 makes this clear, stating:

The \$10 million in new funding for aged care respite beds will ensure that, following the ACT government's decision to close Burrangiri, the number of respite beds in the ACT does not reduce overall. The funding will go to a provider for either a new facility or to extend an existing facility.

Nowhere did the federal Labor Party say this funding would deliver both the continuation of Burrangiri and a separate new or expanded facility. Following the federal election, the clear intent of the Assembly, in its May 2025 motion, and the strong advocacy of the Save Burrangiri Action Group, resulted in the ACT government extending its contract with the Salvation Army to operate Burrangiri for two years.

Senator Gallagher, Mr Smith and I have spent many hours engaging with the Save Burrangiri Action Group, Ms Carrick and Senator Pocock since then, and we have heard that a solution that did not see Burrangiri continue to offer aged-care respite would be unacceptable. So we were, in some ways, back where we started—but now, with the advantage of having an ACT senator, who also happens to be the finance minister, at the table. I say "back where we started" because one thing has not changed. The brief I received in June 2024, as health minister, is publicly available and stated:

To continue the usage of Burrangiri as a respite care facility into the longer term, based on outstanding maintenance and building age, a significant scope of works would be required. To undertake the full body of works the facility would need to be vacated.

One thing that we can all agree on is that Burrangiri has served the Canberra community well for well over three decades. Residents enjoy the caring, homelike environment and carers feel confident that their loved ones are safe in the care of the amazing staff.

But, in the absence of a significant refurbishment, the building is reaching the end of its operational life. The commonwealth funding will enable the delivery of essential safety upgrades, including a full building sprinkler system, new fire hydrants, updated fire detection and alarm systems, improved fire compartmentation and associated

building improvements. In addition to these critical life safety works, the commonwealth funded project will deliver a substantial modernisation of the facility. These works will improve accessibility, amenity and functionality throughout Burrangiri and includes significant upgrades to building infrastructure and resident facilities.

This is far more than a lick of paint and some new carpet. Key works include replacement of aging mechanical services, including heating, cooling and ventilation, with energy efficient electric systems; electrical and lighting upgrades, including replacement of the main switchboard and distribution boards; construction of a new commercial kitchen; sustainability improvements, such as double glazed windows; upgrades to clinical and staff areas; demolition and rebuilding of courtyard infill extensions to make them safer and more usable; and refurbishment of resident bedrooms and bathrooms, including vital accessibility upgrades, landscaping works and the incorporation of dementia friendly designed principles.

While some will no doubt continue to argue that the only truly urgent upgrades are for fire safety, page 12 of the most recent GHD report states:

The need to temporarily close the facility provides a practical window to undertake additional works that would otherwise be difficult to deliver in an occupied 24-7 residential care environment.

These independent experts, who we commissioned at the behest of the Assembly, go on to say:

A consolidated upgrade approach would enable the ACT government to address existing asset condition, accessibility, amenity, sustainability and service issues, at the same time as the required life safety works. This would reduce the likelihood of repeated future disruptions, improve outcomes for residents and staff, and support the continued use of the building for a care model aligned with a Class 9C facility.

Of course, GHD had already confirmed that a building constructed today to support the respite services Burrangiri currently offers would indeed be a Class 9C facility. But, for completeness, GHG went on to note:

Upgrading the facility to operate a Class 3 building classification would be a considerably higher cost as each of the bedrooms would be required to be separate compartments in terms of acoustics and fire considerations.

Securing the \$10 million investment from the commonwealth will ensure Burrangiri meets contemporary, safety, accessibility and operational standards, so that it can support aged-care respite for many years to come. This is not just important to ensure the ACT government is meeting its responsibilities as a landlord and its commitments to the electrification of gas assets and disability access; it is also vital to ensure the commonwealth can actually secure a provider to deliver respite services after the renovations are complete. This would be challenging if any prospective provider could look at the existing reports and see that the base building infrastructure was unreliable and likely to cause service disruptions. In addition, operating costs would be appreciably higher without these works.

Of course, we are also conscious of the community's strongly expressed views that there should be no loss of service during the closure, and ultimately an expansion of respite for older people in the ACT. In addition to the funding of Burrangiri upgrades, the commonwealth government announced that it will be working with the aged-care sector to ensure replacement respite care is available during the temporary closure period. This includes undertaking an expression of interest process to identify relevant providers to provide respite services in the ACT from July 2027. This process is intended to maintain continuity of respite services and minimise disruption for existing Burrangiri clients and their families. The expression of interest will open later this month.

We also welcome the commonwealth government's announcement that it is extending the Commonwealth Home Support Program until June 2029, which is the program that funds aged care respite in the community. It is anticipated that the commonwealth will undertake a separate market testing process in 2027 to identify registered providers interested in delivering respite services at Burrangiri on a long-term basis once the facility reopens.

We continue to work with the commonwealth on the options to increase respite services across the ACT. In their media release, Senator Gallagher and her colleagues indicated that they are considering proposals already received from providers to increase respite beds, including a proposal from Goodwin Aged Care that many of us are aware of. HammondCare's new dementia village in Curtin will also include dedicated respite beds, while Palliative Care ACT will soon open an expanded Leo's Place, providing an additional two beds for palliative care respite. In addition, conversations continue with Carers ACT about its plans for expanding the provision of respite following the opening of its Crace Respite Cottage and Spence Day Respite Centre.

More than 50,000 Canberrans provide unpaid care to family members, friends or neighbours. Respite offers carers important relief, allowing them time to rest, attend to their own health, maintain employment and participate in social and community life. At the same time, it ensures the person needing care continues to receive safe, high-quality support. Access to respite services during the day or overnight at home or in a community setting is critical to supporting carers' physical, emotional and mental wellbeing, helping to reduce stress and prevent burnout. It is a win-win for the ACT that Burrangiri's 15 respite beds will be maintained into the future and that the commonwealth has committed to exploring options to meet the longer-term residential respite needs of older Canberrans and their families.

I want to acknowledge the advocates who have engaged with me, Senator Gallagher, Mr Smith, Senator Pocock, Ms Carrick and other members of this place, to share their experiences, concerns, insights and ideas, particularly Peter and Penny and the Save Burrangiri Action Group. I would also like to acknowledge and thank the dedicated staff of the Salvation Army, who have provided overnight and day respite services at Burrangiri since 1989. Their commitment to older Canberrans and their families has made an invaluable contribution to our community.

In the motion on 26 March 2026, the Assembly called on the ACT government to work with the commonwealth to confirm an appropriate National Construction Code

classification for Burrangiri, establish governance arrangements for the commonwealth's capital investment, finalise future funding arrangements and provide regular progress reports to the Assembly. I am pleased to say that all elements of the resolution have now been addressed. The ACT government will continue to work with the commonwealth's service providers, carers and the community to maintain and strengthen respite services across the territory.

I present the following paper:

Respite care services—Improvement—Assembly resolution of 26 March 2026—
Government response—Burrangiri Update—Ministerial statement, 20 October
2026.

I move:

That the Assembly take note of the paper.

MS CARRICK (Murrumbidgee) (10.21): I welcome the minister's announcement that Burrangiri will remain open into the future. That is a significant win for carers, families, the Save Burrangiri Action Group and the many people who have worked tirelessly over the past two years to secure the future of this important service. I also acknowledge the minister's recognition that the commonwealth election commitment was widely understood as funding for additional respite beds. That is certainly how many carers and community members understood it. While I am pleased Burrangiri has been saved, I am disappointed that we have missed an opportunity to significantly increase respite capacity in the ACT.

The government's own GHD report identified approximately \$2.7 million in fire safety works required to keep Burrangiri operating. Instead, the full \$10 million of commonwealth contribution will now be spent on Burrangiri, with the balance funding a range of maintenance works and asset renewals. Many of these improvements will undoubtedly enhance the facility; however, the timeframes for their delivery have not been identified, and they do not create a single additional respite bed. In effect, commonwealth capital funding that was promoted as supporting additional respite capacity is now being used largely to address long-term maintenance and capital renewal requirements.

I am also concerned about the impact of the planned closure of Burrangiri for between six and 12 months and the potential loss of jobs. Burrangiri currently provides around half of Canberra's dedicated overnight respite capacity, yet we still do not know where those services will be provided during the closure period, what the replacement arrangements will cost or what impact there will be on staff, carers and families who rely on those beds.

At the same time, a proposal from Goodwin offered a practical opportunity to create 18 additional high-care respite beds using accommodation that was already designed for future aged care use. Had that proposal been pursued alongside the essential safety works at Burrangiri, the ACT could have retained its existing 15 beds while adding an additional 18 high-care beds. Instead, we will spend \$10 million and emerge with the same number of beds we have today.

Another concern I have is that there still is no needs analysis examining the ACT's future demand for low, medium and high-needs respite, including disability respite. Before spending \$10 million, surely the first question should have been, "What respite services does the ACT actually need?" The answer to that question should shape investment decisions, not the condition of a single building.

This debate has also highlighted a broader issue: the commonwealth funds aged care and respite services, yet there remains no clear long-term funding model for block funding of respite care beyond 2029. Carers need certainty. Providers need certainty. Governments need a plan.

While I welcome the decision to save Burrangiri and I acknowledge the work undertaken by carers, advocates and governments to achieve that outcome, I remain disappointed that we have not used this opportunity to expand respite capacity and to deliver the additional beds that many Canberrans expected. I will continue to work constructively with the ACT government, the commonwealth government, providers, carers and community advocates to develop a long-term respite strategy, secure sustainable funding and deliver the additional respite capacity that Canberra families need and deserve.

MR EMERSON (Kurrajong) (10.25): I thank the minister for her statement. This morning I want to welcome the minister's constructive engagement across party lines on this issue, particularly with Ms Carrick and Senator Pocock, and with the community more broadly, which is affected by these decisions. To be clear, I am not opposed to spending \$10 million on Burrangiri. Indeed, I welcome the upgrades that will ensure this facility remains operational and fit for purpose into the future.

But there are clear concerns here about walking back an election commitment that was made to provide additional respite capacity for our community, and that is not good enough, because we know, including through a committee inquiry that was carried out in this place, more respite capacity is required—is needed—to meet our community's needs.

In the press release that I believe the minister has quoted from this morning, Minister Butler said:

Labor's Healthcare Plan for the ACT is a 10 million in new capital infrastructure funding to build more aged care respite beds.

And in the dot points from that press release:

The funding will go to a provider for either a new facility, or to extend an existing facility.

I accept that if you read the fine print—if you read the entire media release—then I take the minister's point. But in a following media release issued by the Albanese government on 6 March 2026—this year, long after we learned Burrangiri would stay open—on the changes to the Commonwealth Home Support Program Grant Guidelines, to ensure Burrangiri and other eligible providers could apply for these grants to provide

cottage respite services, it said:

This builds on the Government's commitment to deliver an additional \$10 million for new respite beds in the ACT.

The federal Minister for Aged Care and Seniors, Sam Rae, on that date said:

Today's announcement provides important certainty for families who rely on Burrangiri, close to the people and places they love while the Government works towards delivering its broader commitment for new respite beds in the ACT.

There are two commitments there in that press release. So, if Canberrans were expected to read the fine print in the original media release, why didn't the federal Minister for Aged Care and Seniors do so before issuing this media release this year, in March?

I think this is just not good enough, and I suppose my frustration here is that Canberrans expect their government to back them up and not to back up mates on the hill, when we get these sorts of decisions which do not fulfil commitments that have been made to our community.

Now, last week, a federal minister was upset with actions from the ACT government. Julian Hill came out swinging because of a lack of action on illegal tobacco in the ACT. He said things like:

I don't think anyone would accept there's an unqualified human right to flog illegal stuff trying to get kids hooked on nicotine and vapes and funding organised criminals.

He also said:

We're at risk of becoming a national joke here in the ACT if the national capital is the last place in the country where every strip-shopping centre and shopping mall has illegal tobacco.

He went hard because he felt that he had to, to get the ACT government to act. And later that day, we got a commitment from the government to introduce legislation this year, or at least a statement in response to that.

Government members interjecting—

MR SPEAKER: Members!

MR EMERSON: In this case, we have not heard the ACT minister push back and say, "Actually, we need more for our community." We need Burrangiri—fantastic; it is great that there is funding meant for that. But we need additional respite beds as well, and we have got clear commitments here to do that. Instead, we are seeing defence of federal colleagues instead of pushing back. So it is not so much a criticism of, "This is not ACT government responsibility." I accept that. But we have had commitments, including prior to the election, and again in March of this year, not just to Burrangiri but to increase respite capacity, and to provide additional beds, which our community needs, and we all agree our community needs.

It would be great if we could actually unite in this Assembly and say to the commonwealth, “This isn’t good enough.” We need more for the ACT. We need more from the commonwealth—rather than saying, “Okay, well these are the grounds on which this commitment has been fulfilled and so there is no further action required.” I take the point from the minister, and I think upgrades for Burrangiri to give it a long-term certainty are welcome and should be celebrated, and we should be pleased with that commitment, but we should also be holding the line on a broader commitment to deliver additional respite capacity, which was made not just prior to the election, but on 6 March this year.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Crime—youth crime—Assembly resolution 12 June 2026—response

Ministerial statement

MR PETTERSSON (Yerrabi—Minister for Business and Industry, Minister for Arts, Creative Industries and the Night-Time Economy, Minister for Children, Youth and Families, Minister for Multicultural Affairs, and Minister for Skills, Training and Industrial Relations) (10.29): I rise today to give the government response to the Legislative Assembly resolution made on 12 June 2026.

The Legislative Assembly resolution noted serious concerns raised by members of the retail sector about crime and retail theft, alongside abuse and antisocial behaviour towards retail workers. The ACT government takes the concerns raised very seriously and is focused on improving community safety impacted by the behaviour of young people, including through a coordinated and effective youth justice system. This is a great opportunity to highlight how the government is committed to bringing together initiatives for prevention, early intervention and therapeutic responses for some of our youngest and most at-risk Canberrans.

The resolution called on the government to develop and table a Youth Justice Strategic Plan to identify practical points of early intervention and to ensure repeat young offenders are subject to timely, multi-agency case conferencing. I am pleased to table that plan with you today and to share with you reforms that are already strengthening the support that young people receive, as well as future actions that will continue to improve the youth justice system.

Importantly, a key aspect of this plan is our strong commitment to Closing the Gap, particularly target 11, to reduce the rate of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people in detention by at least 30 per cent by 2031. This is a commitment we take seriously. As we know, there are too many Aboriginal young people in contact with the ACT youth justice system. We understand the important role of this plan in addressing the current rates of over-representation. That is why we have committed to partnering with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elected Body to develop a way of ensuring monitoring and accountability for the actions within this plan.

The plan provides a road map over five years to further build a youth justice system that is therapeutic, inclusive and focuses on supporting young people to heal, grow and

contribute positively to their communities, starting when a young person is first at risk of making contact with the system and tracking the systemic responses through to reintegration following detention.

The plan contains six key focus areas to build a modern and supportive youth justice system, including: (1) providing earlier support; (2) diverting young people from the justice system; (3) promoting equity, eliminating discrimination and addressing over-representation; (4) using a caring and healing approach; (5) respecting young people's rights; and (6) helping young people return to the community after detention. These six focus areas were developed through a collaborative process, bringing together existing government commitments outlined in strategies, frameworks, action plans and government responses to independent reviews. It also reflects what we heard from young people, families and stakeholders through a range of engagement and consultation over recent years.

Each of these focus areas reflects commitments made and responses currently in place across the ACT government aimed at improving the youth justice system. In bringing these commitments together into a single plan, we understood the importance of consultation on the plan itself, as well as anticipating future consultation on individual actions outlined in the plan.

The government engaged closely with the Elected Body as an initial priority. I would like to thank the Elected Body for their time and advice to consider and shape this plan. The Elected Body was broadly supportive of the strategic plan and welcomed the focus on therapeutic, trauma-informed and early intervention approaches, diversion, human rights, cultural connection and improving outcomes for young people.

The Elected Body also identified opportunities to strengthen the strategic plan. This feedback informed a number of amendments to the strategic plan, including expanding the focus on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people to recognise the role of self-determination, shared decision-making and Aboriginal Community-Controlled Organisations in designing, delivering and evaluating responses for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people.

Importantly, in response to the Elected Body feedback, a new action has been added for the ACT government in partnership with the Elected Body: to develop a monitoring and reporting framework for the actions within this plan. The framework will support the success of the plan through accountability and collaboration and is focused on achieving better outcomes for children and young people. Through this collaboration, we recognise the importance of self-determination and will ensure responses are culturally safe and community led.

Following consultation with the Elected Body, we invited the public and community safety partners to tell us what they think about the draft Youth Justice Strategic Plan. I would like to acknowledge that the strategic plan does not begin with a blank page; the plan and its actions have been shaped by the many recommendations and experiences of communities, young people, families, oversight and review bodies, and other stakeholders over recent years. These include the voices of young people engaged in previous throughcare work, which has provided evidence and insights that are foundational to the plan's priorities and direction.

The consultation undertaken on the plan itself is an important step to check that we are on the right track. However, it represents a step on the road ahead and is one of many in a continuing process of engagement and collaboration with those the plan affects, especially young people and our stakeholders, as we implement the plan and deliver actions.

I would like to sincerely thank those who have contributed to this plan, especially those who have shared personal experiences about the impacts of the youth justice system. We heard from oversight bodies, ACT Policing, Bimberi Youth Justice Centre, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Justice Caucus, community organisations, peak bodies, justice advocacy groups, as well as parents of young people involved in the youth justice system.

We made sure to reach out to those groups specifically listed in this resolution Assembly: “retail workers retailers, shopping centre management, ACT Policing, Canberra PCYC, youth justice, schools, child and family services, health services and relevant community organisations, including Aboriginal community-controlled Organisations” as part of the consultation to inform the Youth Justice Strategic Plan.

Mr Speaker, in response to the resolution, I will point out our focus on early support and diversions and provide reassurance that we are identifying practical points of early intervention, including schools, police contact, retail precincts, youth services, family services and community organisations.

We know that punitive, criminogenic responses increase the likelihood of reoffending. That is why a key focus of this plan is early, trauma-informed support. The government is already delivering on reforms in this area. A significant example is that we raised the minimum age of criminal responsibility. We know therapeutic accountability is the most effective way to reduce harm, prevent escalation and divert vulnerable young people away from a pathway that too often leads to serious and repeat offending.

To support this reform, we have introduced the Therapeutic Support Panel to provide long-term therapeutic responses tailored to each young person’s needs. Referrals to the Therapeutic Support Panel have a genuine focus on early intervention and prevention, as police and others endeavour to respond innovatively and divert children and young people away from a criminal justice response.

We have also implemented the Safer Youth Response Service targeting immediate, 24-hour crisis intervention and support. We know there is important work ahead relating to these initiatives, which is also captured in the plan under focus area 1: providing earlier support.

This plan’s focus on early support recognises what the evidence tells us: that children are better supported through health, education, family and community services than through the criminal justice system. It reflects our commitment to intervening earlier, responding therapeutically wherever possible and helping young people get back on the right path.

We agree with the resolution’s call that repeat young offenders have timely

multi-agency case conferencing, involving police, youth justice, education, child and family services, health services, parents or carers and youth outreach providers, where appropriate. That is why this is specifically captured within the Youth Justice Strategic Plan. For example, the Recidivist Offender Multi-Agency Round Table brings together ACT Policing, youth justice, child and youth services, education and therapeutic services to identify intervention opportunities and coordinate responses for high-risk young people causing significant harm in the community.

Mr Speaker, we have listened to feedback from all stakeholders, and as a result, we have strengthened the plan. Stakeholders broadly welcomed the direction of the plan, and it was helpful to hear that our policy was on the right track. However, I acknowledge calls for the plan to include stronger government commitment to actions and clearer responsibility, reporting and monitoring, and for the plan to address a lack of clarity around addressing social determinants of offending.

We have developed a listening report capturing all of these views that will be published on the YourSay website, which can be accessed by everyone. And we will respond to many details as actions within the plan are underway. We also heard a call for more details about how the plan will be implemented and measured to ensure that it achieves the changes that we need.

The ACT government understands the need for accountability and reporting on the progress under the plan. For this reason, we are committed to developing a monitoring and reporting framework that will support the success of the plan through developing baseline measures and targets, allocating responsibilities and timeframes that will be publicly reported on in annual reviews each year. This framework will be developed in partnership with the Elected Body and relevant ACT government directorates and agencies and will increase accountability and transparency of the progress of the plan.

The plan has also been updated to include an expanded focus on victims of youth offending, to ensure we get the balance right between emphasising accountability, addressing underlying drivers of offending, and protecting victims and community safety.

We also heard calls for a stronger commitment to action from the government. This plan creates a roadmap for significant and important work ahead and is one of many ways we are showing our commitment.

Our work is backed by government investment. The 2026-27 ACT budget includes more than \$5 million to continue youth justice reform and strengthen youth justice services, alongside a further \$561,000 in capital upgrades investment to strengthen safety, security, wellbeing and service delivery at Bimberi Youth Justice Centre.

We will invest in a new throughcare pilot to support young people as they reconnect with family, education, employment and community services as they transition back to the community, and to build an evidence base needed to inform future throughcare models.

This investment supports the government's commitment to youth justice reform by strengthening the capacity of Bimberi, improving outcomes for young people involved

in the youth justice system, and progressing key recommendations from the Healthy Centre and Jumbunna Reviews.

The ACT government is also providing additional funding to enable continued delivery of the government's reforms, alongside raising the minimum age of criminal responsibility, to support the service system transition from criminal and punitive responses to therapeutic responses to harmful behaviours in children and young people. This initiative includes funding to continue delivering individualised therapeutic support through the Therapeutic Support Panel and \$412,000 in 2027-28 for the continuation of the Safer Youth Response Service.

Through the feedback and submissions we received, it is clear that Canberrans understand the importance of early responses and therapeutic intervention because they lead to better outcomes for young people and because they are the most effective in promoting community safety.

Mr Speaker, the Youth Justice Strategic Plan builds on this understanding and the approach the government has already taken to ensure that children and young people get the help and support they need before things get worse. This is happening through the Next Steps for Our Kids action plan to strengthen family support and improve the child protection system; through the implementation of the Therapeutic Support Panel, providing therapeutic responses tailored to each young person's needs; and through the Safer Youth Response Service designed for 24-hour crisis intervention and support.

The resolution calls for repeat young offenders to be subject to multi-agency case conferencing. We agree that this is an excellent and evidence-based response to young people causing harm. That is why such coordinated responses are already in place for young people with complex needs.

We also heard important feedback about the broader youth justice system relating to self-determination, institutional accountability and systemic disadvantage. These are serious issues, and we will continue to work across government to address these concerns, particularly as they relate to the youth justice system.

As I have previously said, these changes will not be instant. This is long-term work. This is work we are committed to. We are ensuring that we have an evidence-based youth justice system that addresses the causes of offending, supports victims and communities and reduces the likelihood of harm occurring again.

Although we did not receive any responses or formal submissions regarding retail theft, we do recognise the community's experiences and perceptions of young people's offending and harmful behaviour. ACT Policing continues to monitor trends in youth offending and remains committed to supporting evidence-based, multi-agency approaches that improve outcomes for vulnerable children and young people.

We know that a justice system that is therapeutic, focuses on meeting the needs of young people and prepares young people for the future is a more effective system—one that creates safety for young people and for the community. This Youth Justice Strategic Plan helps us to do that.

Mr Speaker, overall, the strategic plan aims to make the ACT youth justice system more supportive, fair, inclusive and focused on providing young people with the right help at the right time. It is an important milestone, and I look forward to updating the Assembly on progress annually.

I present the following papers:

ACT Youth Justice Strategic Plan 2026-2031, undated.

Youth Justice Strategic Plan—Development—Assembly resolution of 12 June 2026—Government response—Ministerial statement, 20 October 2026.

I move:

That the Assembly take note of the ministerial statement.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Mental health—Inquiry into Men’s Suicide Rates—government response

Ministerial statement

DR PATERSON (Murrumbidgee—Minister for Health, Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Police, Fire and Emergency Services, and Minister for Gaming Reform) (10.44): I am tabling the government response to the Standing Committee on Social Policy’s final report of the Inquiry into Men’s Suicide Rates.

I would like to begin by acknowledging that this is a sensitive matter and that suicide and self-harm have devastating impacts on people, their families and the broader community. I would like to acknowledge the important work of the Standing Committee on Social Policy and reaffirm that the ACT government welcomes the committee’s careful consideration of this important issue.

The inquiry, which commenced in April 2025, provided an important opportunity to hear directly from the ACT community and stakeholders about the factors contributing to suicide amongst boys and men. The input received through the inquiry highlighted both the significant impact of suicide among boys and men and the strong commitment across our community to improving the wellbeing of boys and men.

I would like to thank the committee for undertaking this inquiry and for the thoughtful and comprehensive report, which was published on 4 June 2026. I have read this with interest and note the important contribution of this report in highlighting that suicide disproportionately affects boys and men and the complexity of factors that can affect wellbeing throughout the life course.

I am pleased to say that the government has given extensive consideration to the findings and welcomes the recommendations. The government has agreed to three recommendations and agreed in principle to a further nine recommendations. Seven recommendations are already reflected in existing government policy, and the remaining recommendations have been noted.

The government does not disagree with any of the committee's recommendations. We have undertaken consultation across government and considered a range of policy and action areas. These include suicide and crisis support services; housing supports; gambling, alcohol and drug use harm; supports for carers; school initiatives; community sector funding; cultural responsiveness of services; and data and reporting improvements.

The government response demonstrates our ongoing commitment to reducing suicide and self-harm through a coordinated, evidence-based and person-centred approach. This is being achieved through a multisector approach involving government, community and lived experience stakeholders. It highlights significant work already underway, as well as planned reforms across the ACT service system, and reinforces the government's commitment to ensuring the needs of boys and men are considered within broader efforts to improve mental health, wellbeing and suicide prevention outcomes for all Canberrans.

Let us also reflect on the real people who this inquiry addresses. They are fathers, sons, brothers, partners, friends, colleagues and community members. Ensuring their safety and wellbeing is critical as it is intrinsically linked to the safety and wellbeing of the broader community. This is why it is important that support is available when and where people need it.

Some important examples of targeted supports already in place includes services provided by Menslink, EveryMan and Canberra PCYC, which assist vulnerable people and young men through mentoring, counselling, education, diversion and community-based support, and the innovative Caring Dads program for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander fathers run by Yeddung Mura.

Through considerable consultation with the sector and community the government continues to work to address identified service gaps. For example, there was an identified need for more peer support. In response to this the government has funded the Peer CARE Companion in the Community program delivered by Roses in the Ocean. Another example where the government has responded to an identified service gap is the dedicated suicide prevention, intervention, aftercare and postvention services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, which is delivered by Thirrili.

Additionally, work is underway to identify, develop and implement services that contribute to a universal aftercare model as part of the joint Australian and ACT Government Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Bilateral Agreement. Under this stream of funding, the Youth Coalition of the ACT is leading a co-design project to develop an aftercare model for young people aged 12 to 15. The co-design process also includes carers' and family members' input—and boys and men are an important part of this process. The outcomes of the co-design project will inform future initiatives that aim to improve the quality and access to universal aftercare for all young Canberrans.

The government is committed to a strong, inclusive and resilient community sector and values the critical role that the community sector plays in suicide prevention and the promotion of mental wellbeing. This commitment is demonstrated through the Mental Health Commissioning Strategic Investment Plan. Under this plan the government will move to longer term funding agreements with the NGO sector, recognising that these

arrangements support workforce retention, improve service and data quality, strengthen sector stability and enhance the experience of care for people accessing services.

Whilst there is a lot of good work underway, we know we can do more and that this is needed across government and the community, not just within the traditional remit of mental health services. We know, for example, that gambling harm, alcohol and other substance use disorders are high-risk factors contributing to suicidal distress. We know that veterans experience higher rates of suicide. We know that experience of domestic, family and sexual violence is a strong risk factor for suicide and self-harm, affecting both victims and perpetrators. The same is true for adverse childhood experiences.

We are increasingly aware of the potentially harmful influences of social media, including the manosphere, on young men and boys, not only in the impacts of their mental health but also in rising misogyny, which has no place in our society. We must protect our young people. To borrow the words of a senior official at the United Nations Women's Agency:

It is about creating a world where boys and girls alike can grow up free from the toxic pressures of harmful gender expectations.

The government response to the inquiry highlights the importance of strong connections between government, community sector, lived experience expertise and community members to achieve better outcomes for boys and men. I strongly agree that whole-of-government, whole-of-community approaches are essential in this space, because no single strategy will achieve sustained outcomes in isolation.

To achieve meaningful and lasting change, we need a range of efforts to protect and improve the wellbeing of Canberrans. There is already significant work underway. For example, this year the government, working together with stakeholders, launched the ACT Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Strategy 2026-36 and the Capital of Equality Strategy Second Action Plan. The government also continues its ongoing investments in areas such as public housing, alcohol and other drug harm minimisation and support for people in the justice system. Implemented together, these strategies and actions will create a synergy towards better outcomes for all.

To provide the territory a renewed strategic focus on suicide prevention, we are currently scoping the development of an ACT suicide prevention implementation plan against the National Suicide Prevention Strategy. This will map the existing ACT initiatives and inform priorities for the coming years. It will involve consideration of the needs of priority population groups, which will include boys and men, to ensure an evidence-informed approach to suicide prevention efforts in the ACT.

We have a strong foundation for a collaborative whole-of-government, whole-of-community approach to suicide prevention. But I acknowledge that more needs to be done, as well as recognising suicide rates in men and boys in the ACT, as well as other vulnerable groups. There is considerable work ahead of us. The government welcomes the committee's report and the contribution that it makes to this important conversation. We remain committed to working alongside people with lived experience, families and community organisations and government partners to reduce suicide and improve wellbeing. There is a lot more work to do, and we are committed

to continuing this work.

I will shortly be progressing a suicide prevention roundtable to build on the work of the committee. Stakeholders can expect to hear from my office shortly with a “save the date” for the new year. Recognising that this issue extends beyond the political landscape, I look forward to the possibility of a multipartisan approach to continuing the conversation across all forums, including the possibility of my colleagues co-hosting the roundtable with me. We know that suicide and self-harm impact many lives, and we need to ensure that all major reforms bring meaningful change.

I present the following paper:

Social Policy—Standing Committee—Report 5—*Inquiry into men’s suicide rates*—

Government response, undated.

Government response—Ministerial statement, 20 October 2026.

I move:

That the Assembly take note of the ministerial statement.

MR BRADDOCK (Yerrabi) (11.15): I would like to thank the minister for the update, and also I would also like to extend my personal appreciation to all personnel who were involved in helping to protect our community and preparing to respond to any emergency, fire or storm. The outlook for the ACT in terms of bushfires is an average level of risk this spring, with warmer overnight temperatures and below average rainfall expected. We are not, however, immune, and it should be noted that there is an increased risk of bushfire on the New South Wales south coast.

Therefore I am pleased to see the level of fuel management activities that is occurring in preparation for the bushfire season, as well as the number of trail works that have been completed. It must be remembered storms and fire are not the only hazards to the community over the summer months. With climate change, heat is becoming an increasing risk to people’s health, particularly those who may be vulnerable, including to young people, seniors, those living with a disability and/or health conditions or those living in housing that is not able to be cooled adequately or those required to work outside or in physically demanding workplaces.

Heat places increased demand on our emergency services, our health system and other community services. Amongst other things, it leads to increased domestic violence, diminished productivity and heightened risk of workplace accidents. I wish the government would devote the same time, attentions and resources to addressing the impacts of heat, which we have seen is an escalating risk in our community. Over the latest European summer the impacts of heat can be seen with the devastating loss of 35,000 excess and heat-related deaths that occurred during back-to-back heatwaves. Ensuring the protection of Canberrans is critical going forward.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Transport and City Services—Standing Committee Amendment to reporting date

MR CAIN (Ginninderra) (11.17): I move:

That, notwithstanding standing order 174(d), the Standing Committee on Transport and City Services shall present its report on the Urban Forest and Planning Legislation Amendment Bill 2026 by 27 November 2026.

I look forward, I trust, to the members' support for this. The committee will be presenting its report by 27 November this year.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Legal Affairs—Standing Committee Scrutiny report 23

MS BARRY (Ginninderra) (11.17): I present the following report:

Legal Affairs—Standing Committee (Legislative Scrutiny Role)—Scrutiny Report 23, dated 13 October 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 23 contains the committee's comments on eight bills, 31 pieces of subordinate legislation, proposed amendments to three bills, one government responses and two national laws.

The report was circulated to members when the Assembly was not sitting.

I commend the report to the Assembly.

Economics, Industry and Recreation—Standing Committee Report 5

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS (Brindabella) (11.18): I present the following report:

Economics, Industry and Recreation—Standing Committee—Report 5—*Inquiry into Canberra's Night-Time Economy*, dated 15 October 2026, together with extracts of the relevant minutes of proceedings.

I move:

That the report be noted.

There are others who I think may want to speak on this report, so in the interests of time I will speak, as committee chair, to say thank you very much to my committee colleagues for the work on this report. As with many of the topics that we have been

looking at recently, it was a very interesting report. The discussions that we had over various options I found extremely engaging.

Thank you to the secretariat as always for the excellent work that they have done. This is one of the members of the secretariat's first report, and for a first go it was a brilliant piece of work. Also I really appreciate all the witnesses who came to our inquiry and the citizens of the ACT who took the time to make a submission, which helped us in our work to present this report this morning.

This is the fifth report of the Standing Committee on Economics, Industry and Recreation for the Eleventh Assembly.

The inquiry received 22 submissions and held public hearings on 12 and 13 May 2026. The report contains 33 recommendations to government, including to establish a night-time economy commissioner and deliver a night-time economy activation strategy. The report also recognises the diversity of activities in the night-time economy in the ACT, recommending a range of measures to support local businesses and creative industries.

I thank the other members of the committee, and the many individuals and organisations who gave their time to the inquiry.

I commend the report to the Assembly.

MS CARRICK (Murrumbidgee) (11.19): I welcome the report into Canberra's night-time economy and thank the chair, the committee members, the secretariat and everyone who contributed to the inquiry. Much of the media coverage has focused on the recommendations for a night-time economy commissioner and the return of the city loop bus service. These are important recommendations and deserve the attention that they are getting.

However, there is another aspect of the report that has received far less attention: the future of Canberra's town centres. One of the strongest messages from the inquiry was that Canberra's night-time economy should not be completely centred on Civic alone. As the committee heard, our growing town centres must play a greater role in providing entertainment, hospitality, cultural activities and community spaces closer to where people live. The report recognises that Woden, Belconnen, Tuggeranong, Gungahlin and the future Molonglo Town Centre should all become part of a distributed network of entertainment precincts serving their local communities. This is about more than nightlife; it is about creating vibrant town centres where people can meet friends after work, enjoy local food and entertainment, attend cultural events and spend time in safe and active public spaces without having to travel across Canberra. This includes sports and recreation activities.

The report is particularly important for Woden. With the Southern Gateway development, significant residential growth and major investment planned for the town centre, there is a real opportunity to create a thriving entertainment precinct from the outset rather than trying to retrofit one later.

Importantly, the report recommends not just new precincts but a roadmap to guide their

planning, activation and delivery, together with governance arrangements to ensure someone is responsible for making it happen. If we are serious about creating a more vibrant and connected Canberra, then these town centre recommendations deserve just as much attention as the headline reforms.

MS VASSAROTTI (Kurrajong) (11.21): I would like to thank my colleagues who are on the committee for the report that we have delivered. This report into Canberra's night-time economy could not have come at a more critical time. We are really pleased to have seen the committee process come to a conclusion and reflect many of the calls that the ACT Greens made at the 2024 election.

The Greens knew then that we needed to focus on the night-time economy. We called for a night-time economy commissioner, to support live venues. We have been talking for years about the need to declare entertainment precincts, and we knew that we needed to provide support for businesses impacted by construction work in areas where the night-time economy is occurring. The committee inquiry has backed in these calls.

Right now, it does feel as though our city is balanced on a knife-edge. On one hand, we feel that we are moments away from being rid of the shackles of intense construction and stepping into a new era of urban beauty and thriving local businesses. On the other hand, we are a moment away from the next construction blitz, one that risks killing off more local businesses and turning key thoroughfares into dirt and gravel.

The Greens appreciate the need for many of these infrastructure improvements and, for the most part, we believe that the city will be better off for them over the long term. Nevertheless, they are having a real and very apparent impact on our city right now. There is no sugar-coating it: getting into Civic at the moment is awful. I have heard from so many Canberrans, at my mobile offices and in participatory town hall meetings, who say they have simply given up. For them, the city centre is no longer a destination with any appeal.

At the same time, this level of construction followed a period of lockdowns and saw many of us turn away from the centralised urbanisation of 80s design towards grounded, local businesses and neighbourhood night-time economies that felt safer, more reliable and more directly supported in our own neighbourhoods.

I am so glad that, as we have moved through this decade, suburban venues across our electorates have, by and large, retained that deep community connection, because they offer so much more than any chain in the city centre ever could. But this appreciation, shared by everyday Canberrans and many in this place, cannot stand alone. It must be backed up by real work to ensure that it remains viable for these institutions to remain a part of our community long into the future.

In my electorate of Kurrajong, we are spoilt for choice, with local venues that offer trivia nights, drag bingo, live music, local bands, queer community fundraisers, and so much more. From Gang Gang Cafe in Downer to Edgar's in Ainslie; from the Old Canberra Inn to Tilley's in Lyneham: these venues contribute to the heart of our community. They enable us to come together, share food, share stories, and remind us that community really is our superpower.

But even a superhero has kryptonite. Despite these venues having stood the test of time, the lack of a clear framework to declare entertainment precincts across our city is putting them at serious risk. We want these venues to keep operating—at least, that is the overwhelming message I hear from our community. But it is completely unrealistic to expect a live-music venue to meet the volume requirements of a library when its entire purpose is to make some noise.

Of course, there has to be give and take. Local venues need to earn their social licence by being considerate neighbours. Right now, current sound regulation laws mean that the moment a few complaints come in from new residents, venues are caught between a rock and a hard place, unable to find a way forward without completely undermining the value they bring to the community.

I have the privilege of serving an incredibly diverse electorate, both in its community make-up and in its rich history. Areas within Kurrajong have been vibrant hubs for decades, whether it is the Kingston shops since the 1920s or the Ainslie shops since the 1950s. That history gives them real character, and it has given them the time to work through the kinks and become truly amazing local centres. But it also means that they need a little TLC. What I am hearing from the community is that neglected maintenance is severely limiting our public spaces. From botched paver renewals taking nearly a year in Dickson, to community parks being left to dry out, and the grass turning to dirt in Manuka, there is a clear need for a better approach.

Similarly, we need to look at how we manage our city centre, so that simple, everyday tasks are not made unbearable. I have had constituents reach out to my office, confused and frustrated to find disability parking spots temporarily taken over by construction skip bins, undermining community confidence, no matter how temporary it is meant to be. We have developers taking over bike lanes because they are not held accountable for managing their own space requirements. The limited routes left to navigate the city are having a massive impact on my constituents, with rat-running through quiet suburban streets becoming increasingly common. Ultimately, the amenity of our streets and the vibrancy of our nightlife have a massive impact on the people of Kurrajong, both directly and indirectly.

In that spirit, I would like to thank my committee colleagues for delivering this report. The vibrancy and the amenity of our local night-time economy matter deeply to the many Canberrans that I engage with daily, as their local representative. I am sure that is the same experience of my committee colleagues Ms Lee and Mr Emerson. I look forward to hearing the government's response, and I commit to following this up, to ensure that we secure better outcomes for local businesses and our local community, not just for the big franchises looking to fill the void in our night-time economy.

MS CLAY (Ginninderra) (11.28): I want to thank the committee for this report. It looks like a really good body of work, and I am looking forward to reading it in detail. It was great to see, as my colleague Ms Vassarotti mentioned, that some calls that the Greens have been making for a long time have been picked up in the report—continuing to work with entertainment precincts, making sure that we are developing in a way that allows for live music in our city centres and town centres, and making sure that we have a night-time commissioner, in whatever form it may be, as some other cities have done. That has been very helpful for other cities. It is also about making sure that we have

really good public transport and transport arrangements, so that people can go to things and then get home from things. It is really good to see all of that in the report.

Canberrans love the arts, and we love live performance and live music. We have a really strong appetite for it. We love things like the national “folkie”. We regularly travel to Sydney and Melbourne for shows, all year round. We have such a strong appetite, but we are seeing that our local scene is struggling. We have local arts organisations and live music venues that are punching way above their weight, but a lot of them are under pressure. M16, with their excellent free evening gallery events in Griffith, draw in hundreds of people every month. They are under a lot of pressure. Canberra Youth Theatre paused their productions for 2025. It was appreciated that we had a big uplift in the budget for the arts, in a difficult budget situation, but there are individual organisations that are really on the edge.

In the evidence given to this committee, there was a lot of evidence about individual impacts. Gang Gang Cafe, run by three musicians, told the inquiry that their insurance premiums have risen significantly year on year, simply because their venue hosts live music, despite the fact that they have a really strong safety record. There are some difficult issues that our venues are working through. If we are not helping, coordinating and making life easier for our venues and our artists, we are at risk of losing those.

Other jurisdictions have shown us what is possible. They have night-time economy commissioners. They have great, accelerated grants programs to help people go out in different districts. They have really good year-round support to make sure they are not just getting festival stimulus, or gig-by-gig stimulus. That is really good for our artists. It is also great for our audiences who want to go out all the time, not just every now and then.

There are also some interesting concepts in this report about looking at unused government buildings. We have done a fair bit of work on who gets peppercorn leases in this town and who does not. With the high commercial vacancy rates that we have in this town at the moment, it is really rich ground. We have seen some innovative not-for-profit arts organisations capitalising on this and putting together some amazing pieces of work; they put together a whole ecosystem of artists and whole shows that people can go to.

There is such an immense opportunity at the moment for government to revitalise our town and city centres and help our scene. If it is done in a way that makes sure we understand that these artists and venues probably cannot afford the commercial rates that are being charged, this will be a win-win.

MR EMERSON (Kurrajong) (11.31): Mr Assistant Speaker, thank you for tabling this report today. I thought this was a great inquiry and a really good example of constructive work across party lines, through engagement and conversation with community members, with people running businesses and with peak bodies, to agree on unanimous recommendations regarding how we can strengthen our night-time economy.

Of course, as Ms Carrick pointed out, a lot of the conversation has been around the establishment of a night-time economy commissioner. This was a common thread

throughout the inquiry. I think that almost every witness recommended the establishment of this role. I want to acknowledge the former night-time economy minister, Ms Cheyne, for accepting that, and expressing it during her appearance at the inquiry. It is not something that I have seen before—a minister listening in to all the evidence and, despite the government’s own submission actually opposing the idea, showing up at the hearing and saying, “I’ve been listening, and I can kind of see the argument that’s being made,” and expressing at least an openness to the idea.

I give credit to the minister for engaging with the evidence that was being presented. I give credit to the witnesses for putting forward strong arguments for that role. Although I have not yet had the opportunity to meet with the new minister to discuss this portfolio, I am hopeful that a similar approach will be adopted in this area. For me, it showed how the Assembly should operate when we can, in engaging constructively in a multipartisan manner and focusing on the issue at hand. I think that happened throughout the inquiry, with the witnesses, the committee members, visiting members, and the minister in her appearance.

A night-time economy activation strategy is among the recommendations delivered by the committee, and this is really focused. If we think about night-life, it has all the normal connotations to it, but it is really about how we make our city a more active place from an economic perspective, and from a social and cultural perspective, in the hours between 6 pm and 6 am. We heard from witnesses that that involves not just clubbing, bars, restaurants and so on, but also things like community sport, and where we go after playing community sport, to hang out and build those connections. A dedicated strategy delivered by a commissioner would be very helpful in that respect, and that is what we heard from witnesses.

As Ms Clay touched on, there is a potential benefit in having some kind of precinct activation program, such as the one in New South Wales. I think it is called the uptown precinct program. We heard about the value of a precinct-level approach. This ties in with Ms Carrick’s points around what we are doing in our town centres. We heard from several witnesses that people want an experience where they can go from one thing to the next. Sometimes, where local businesses see each other as competitors, especially in a tight market, we need to work on making them more collaborative, in offering that precinct-level experience, and working together. There is certainly a role for the government to be proactive in that space, as we have seen the New South Wales commissioner do.

The committee has also called for stronger temporary relief measures for businesses impacted by the ongoing light rail works. This is something I have advocated for consistently over the last 18 months, and I know I am not alone in that. In fact, I am just backing up the calls from local businesses themselves. The government is not responsible for ensuring that every business succeeds, obviously. This is about businesses that have been successful, venues that have been incredibly popular and have won awards, being hugely impacted by a massive infrastructure project, to the point that it is threatening their viability.

I think that—the committee mentioned it as an example—means-tested rent relief makes sense, and it really should have been part of the original budget for this project. I get that the government is not wanting to set a precedent by saying, “We’ll provide

relief any time we do construction in the city.” That would be problematic. But this is an unprecedented level of disruption. Given that, for instance, Sydney has done so, with their light rail small business assistance program, it offers a model for the government to follow through on, so that the businesses that are on the corridor that are impacted by these works are able to survive and get to the other side, and those that were thriving beforehand can thrive once this project is complete.

There are a couple of recommendations that I want to touch on that relate to sound laws. We need to balance the needs of residents with concerns about sound produced by having a good time, which are often valid but can also be vexatious, with the preferences of residents who want to be part of creating that noise. There are a couple of recommendations with respect to numbers of complainants and agent-of-change laws which are worthy of consideration. I am glad that all committee members agreed to them being included in the final report, because this is an area—Ms Vassarotti touched on this, especially in our electorate of Kurrajong—where it is becoming challenging.

Also, in the context of some of the disruption in the city, people are choosing their local suburban venues to go and see live music, and those venues are surrounded by more residents, so they are creating noise. This is an area where it is critical that we get the balance right, and we can look to other jurisdictions as to how best to do that.

All in all, I am really pleased personally with how this report has come together, and I hope that the people who made submissions to the inquiry and appeared as witnesses will be as well. I want to thank my committee colleagues for the way that they have engaged on this and other inquiries to put forward what I think are sensible recommendations on issues that matter to our community. Of course, I thank the secretariat for their work along the way as well.

MR PARTON (Brindabella—Leader of the Opposition) (11.38): I want to echo many of the words from Mr Emerson. I think that this inquiry was conducted in the way that we would expect inquiries to be conducted in this Assembly. I thought that the members of the committee went about their business in an exceptionally good way in regard to trying to get answers to questions and trying to get solutions to problems. Certainly, the committee side of this equation has gone as well as we would expect it to go. The witnesses turned up and told it like it was. I thought there was some good questioning and some great submissions. The ball is in the court of the government now.

Running a business in Canberra is more expensive than running a business in any other comparable jurisdiction. I think that the concerns raised by business owners in the context of these hearings were extremely valid. The cost-of-living crisis has been exacerbated by a number of things. Obviously, when it comes to the centre of town, the construction works are a big thing. We are also talking about a government which seeks to suck money out of small business at every turn, as well as having a fetish for overbearing, compliance-related bureaucracy.

In a lot of cases, they are succeeding in making businesses unviable. My fear is that when, as a city, we have the glittering launch of stage 2A of the tram, the bright, shiny, red tram will cruise past empty, graffiti-covered buildings. I think that is pretty sad. Hospitality, retail and construction businesses are going to the wall left, right and centre in Canberra, and it appears that the government do not really care.

Incidentally, I bumped into Peter Barclay, from King O'Malley's, in the city yesterday. I spoke to him. I heard him on ABC radio earlier in the day, and he touched on the fact that these brave businesspeople have, in many cases, remortgaged their homes to try to survive. He did not go into this in detail, but I have had a number of discussions with individuals who I will not name, but who have gone through this really courageous process of remortgaging their homes. A number of them are under pressure at every turn. They are paying their workers before they pay themselves. Their relationships are under pressure. Their mental health is under pressure. A number of them will spiral into personal crises that they will never recover from.

The government does not seem to care. The government seems to believe, "Any business that closes up, there'll be some other mug that comes along to have another shot at it." That is not my line. That is a line that came from a couple of business owners. In the current cost-of-living crisis, I am not sure that there will be other mugs that come along and have a shot.

I look forward to the government's response to this exceptional report.

MS LEE (Kurrajong) (11.41): The fact that the tabling of this report has garnered so many contributions from so many members demonstrates what an important issue it is, and the fact that it has touched on so many of our constituents. I put on the record my acknowledgement of and thanks to the committee members. There was some doubt, in setting up a committee of five members, about how we would get along and how we would operate. I think we have demonstrated on a number of occasions that, without exception, we have all been willing to be very cooperative, very open-minded and very collegiate when it comes to our committee work. That, I think, is to the credit of each and every member of the committee.

A lot of businesses have been reaching out to each of us—not just as committee members but, of course, in our roles as local members—about how tough it is to do business here in the ACT, and particularly the hospitality businesses. The committee also heard about it during the inquiry into insurance costs. We heard from a number of hospitality businesses about how tough it is when their insurance premiums skyrocket, through no fault of their own. There has been no change to their circumstance but, year on year, they are facing increasing insurance premiums. Of course, in a cost-of-living crisis, it is difficult ultimately to pass that on to the consumer, and it makes doing business difficult.

We have seen, very sadly, particularly over the last year or so, a number of very longstanding and well-established local businesses that have made the difficult decision to close their doors. We are not talking about new businesses that have gone in and been naive about what it is like to run a hospitality business. We are talking about businesses that have been around for decades. Some of them have been going from generation to generation and, ultimately, they have not been able to make it work and have been forced to close their doors.

We also acknowledge, not just as a committee but as an opposition, that the government is not there to solve everything. But there are factors, and there are levers that the government can pull, and we have been advocating for that for some time. Members

may recall that I raised the plight of the businesses along London Circuit, when the Theatre Lane car park was closed—the impact that it was having on local businesses and the impact that it still has on local businesses in that vicinity, and the ongoing disruption that it is having. Some businesses have relocated as a result of those ongoing works.

I still remember—and I will never forget this—one business owner who showed me the docket from a sale. On the day that I met her, she said, “Yesterday, I made \$14 in sales. That was my entire taking for one day.” That is heartbreaking, and the business owner who told me that was in tears, when I sat with her at her business, and she told me, “I made \$14 yesterday.” She said that, just to break even, she needed to make \$280, but she made \$14. That is just heartbreaking.

The report contains a really balanced number of recommendations. There are some that, obviously, go into the broader policy settings, as to what the government can do. There are also some very practical measures that the government can undertake quite quickly to ensure that they are providing some relief to some of the businesses that are doing it tough.

Let us not forget, Mr Speaker, that whilst in this place, in committee hearings and in reports, we talk about the night-time economy and we talk about businesses, it is actually Canberrans who are behind these businesses. We might take an abstract concept and say that it is about the night-time economy, and the government might say, “Yes, we can set up a commissioner and we can do this in the policy settings.” What we can never forget is that there are real Canberrans, their livelihoods, their families and their lives that are behind these businesses. For every business that tells me that they made \$14 yesterday, that is someone, a Canberran, who has a family, who has a mortgage to pay, who has employees to pay and who needs to put food on the table. These are the genuine Canberrans who are doing it tough, and who are doing it for the love of contributing to our community, and we must not ever forget it.

I thank all the Canberrans who put in submissions and who appeared before the public hearings in relation to this inquiry, because it was an important one. I put on the record again my acknowledgement of and thanks to my fellow committee members and the secretariat for their important work in this report.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Public Accounts and Administration—Standing Committee Report 8

MR MILLIGAN (Yerrabi) (11.47): I present the following report:

Public Accounts and Administration—Standing Committee—Report 8—Inquiry into Auditor-General Reports 10/2024: Safer Families Levy and 13/2024: Invoicing and Payments for Digital Health Record Hosting Services, dated 28 September 2026, 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 Public Accounts and Administration for the Eleventh Assembly. For this inquiry, the committee examined the government response to two performance audits and held a public hearing on 13 October 2025. The report makes 15 recommendations in the report. On behalf of the committee, I thank those who contributed to our inquiry. I commend the report to the Assembly.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Administration and Procedure—Standing Committee Statement by chair

MR SPEAKER (Mr Hanson) (11.48): Pursuant to standing order 246A, I wish to make a statement on behalf of the Standing Committee on Administration and Procedure. On 6 May 2026, the Assembly passed a motion requesting that the committee consider the current conventions and guidance for the naming of bills, the content of explanatory statements, and the use of omnibus bills in the ACT and comparable jurisdictions; consider whether any changes are required to the standing orders to support parliamentary scrutiny of proposed legislation by the Assembly; and report back to the Assembly with any recommendations within six months.

At its meetings on 25 May 2026 and 23 July 2026, the committee considered the report of the committee from the Ninth Assembly into omnibus bills and a jurisdictional survey of current practice in other Australian and the New Zealand parliaments. The jurisdictional survey showed that the practices and procedures of the ACT were in line with other parliaments.

The committee was keen to determine whether the issues raised in the Assembly motion of 6 May are a result of weakness in current practices and procedures or, rather, if implementation has at times been deficient. The committee wrote to the Chief Minister, the Leader of the Opposition, the Leader of the Greens, the Head of Service, the Office of Parliamentary Counsel, and the Standing Committee on Legal Affairs in its legislative scrutiny role, seeking a response by 17 August 2026. The committee received two responses which did not indicate any significant issues with the current guidelines and policies and agreed not to proceed with a full inquiry.

Economics, Industry and Recreation—Standing Committee Statement by chair

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS (Brindabella) (11.49): Pursuant to standing order 246A, I wish to make a statement on behalf of the Standing Committee on Economics, Industry and Recreation relating to a new inquiry. Pursuant to standing order 216, the committee has resolved to inquire into fuel prices in the ACT.

In 2019, a select committee inquired into fuel prices and made recommendations to increase competition in the local fuel market. The committee will examine whether these measures were effective, as well as what market forces are driving price differences between the ACT and the wider capital region. Submissions to this inquiry

are open until Wednesday, 18 November 2026, and the committee hopes to hear from a wide range of stakeholders, including businesses and industry groups.

Integrity Commission and Statutory Office Holders—Standing Committee

Statement by chair

MS LEE (Kurrajong) (11.50): Pursuant to standing order 246A, I wish to make a statement on behalf of the Standing Committee on the Integrity Commission and Statutory Office Holders relating to statutory appointments, in accordance with Continuing Resolution 5A.

For the reporting period of 1 July 2025 to 31 December 2025, the committee tabled its return on 4 February 2026. I now advise of a correction to that return, specifically that the committee considered one statutory appointment during that period, not none as previously stated. This appointment was that of the Auditor-General. I now table the revised schedule of statutory appointments considered during this reporting period:

Integrity Commission and Statutory Office Holders—Standing Committee—
Schedule of Statutory Appointments—11th Assembly—Period 1 July to 31
December 2025 (Revised).

Gaming Machine (Harm Prevention and Reduction) Amendment Bill 2026

Dr Paterson, pursuant to notice, presented the bill, its explanatory statement and a Human Rights Act compatibility statement.

Title read by Clerk.

DR PATERSON (Murrumbidgee—Minister for Health, Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Police, Fire and Emergency Services, and Minister for Gaming Reform) (11.52): I move:

That this bill be agreed to in principle.

The bill I am introducing today is for every person who has been impacted by gambling harm. I acknowledge the individuals who have shared with me their personal experiences of gambling harm over the years. Hearing those accounts—hundreds, if not thousands, of accounts over the years that I have worked in this field—has led me on what is now a career dedicated in large part to addressing gambling harm. This week is significant because it also marks Gambling Harm Action Week, a time of year at which we can all reflect on the harm that gambling causes to our community and take action to reduce this harm.

Gambling harm is a significant and pervasive issue facing the ACT population, affecting not only individuals but also families and the whole community. That is why the ACT government is legislating a long-term evidence based program of reform focused on reducing harm from electronic gaming machines, or poker machines. The gambling industry has a clear responsibility to do more to reduce harm. It must actively

prevent and minimise the harm that gambling can cause to individuals, families and the community. As evidence of gambling related harm continues to grow, the status quo is no longer acceptable.

Industry operators are uniquely placed to identify risky gambling behaviour, implement stronger consumer protections and ensure that profits are not derived at the expense of community wellbeing. The ACT community increasingly expects gambling providers to take greater accountability, embrace harm minimisation measures and contribute to a safer and more sustainable gambling environment. In the ACT, more than 58,000 people experience at least one form of gambling harm. The numbers are unacceptable and we have a responsibility to reduce this harm in our community.

I have spent more than 20 years fighting for reform in the ACT and across Australia because I know that gambling harm is not inevitable. It is not something that we should simply accept as the price tag of doing business. Today I am proud to introduce legislation that confronts this reality and sends a clear statement that the status quo is unacceptable, the harm is too great and the time for significant action is now.

This is about more than changing laws; this is about changing lives. It is about protecting families, strengthening our community and putting the wellbeing of Canberrans first. I am proud to be a minister in a cabinet, in a caucus and in a party that has the courage to confront this difficult issue and deliver the change that our community has asked for. We are a government that is putting people above poker machines.

I recognise the role that clubs have played in our history and the contribution they make to our community and social life, but there is the undeniable ever-present harm that occurs from the business model of clubs that hold poker machine licences. The times they are a-changing. We can value our clubs and still be better. We can respect their history without allowing it to dictate our future. Clubs have a tangible choice to make. Clubs with the vision to see a world without poker machine revenue and that embrace and are proactively part of the transition will set up themselves and our community for a strong future.

I am pleased to introduce the Gaming Machine (Harm Prevention and Reduction) Amendment Bill 2026 to the Assembly. The bill provides for significant changes to be made to the Gaming Machine Act and the Gaming Machine Regulation 2004, and associated laws, by introducing a framework for mandatory account based cashless gaming in all venues with gaming machines, a framework to reduce the number of gaming machines in the territory to 1,000 by 2045, and the banning of ATMs and EFTPOS withdrawals in venues with gaming machines.

The ACT Gambling Survey found that gambling on poker machines is the most harmful form of gambling in the territory, accounting for one third of the total burden of gambling harm. When looking at specific populations, the evidence tells us that young men account for more than 40 per cent of the total burden of harm. This is despite them making up just 22 per cent of the general population. Similarly, young women account for the majority of affected others. Women under 40 account for one third of the total burden of harm from affected others.

The government has engaged in a collaborative dialogue with stakeholders about the proposed framework. In May last year, I established the Cashless Gaming Working Group, which included representatives from the ACT clubs industry, community gambling harm advocacy groups, and people with lived experience of gambling harm. The purpose of the working group was to discuss and advise on detailed policy settings for account based gaming and additional gambling harm reduction measures. I thank everyone involved in this process.

Also, I would like to put on the record at this point that, while these reforms are going through the committee process, I will provide two meeting opportunities for ClubsACT. Following this statement today, I will reach out to ClubsACT to seek a November meeting and a March meeting with select clubs that may wish to meet. I do this to promote transparency with the community as we progress through this process.

The bill amends the Gaming Machine Act 2004 and its associated regulations to introduce a mandatory account based gaming framework for the ACT and additional harm reduction measures. The bill includes short- to medium-term measures that are largely designed at the way people use venues and machines. Mandatory account based cashless gaming represents a central part of our harm reduction agenda. People wishing to play EGMs in the ACT will be required to first set up an ID-verified account with the venue, and then they will be issued a unique player account card. This player account card can then be loaded with cash funds for the use of a gaming machine.

Players will also be required to set maximum loss limits when they set up their account. Once a person reaches their pre-committed limit, their account will be suspended. A person will have to wait 48 hours after setting a limit to change it. A person's account will also track their expenditure on gaming machines within a venue and provide them with a clearer picture of gambling losses. A licensee must prepare a monthly activity statement for each person who holds a player account in the licensee's account based system. A licensee commits an offence if they do not provide an activity statement to an account holder within seven days of the end of the relevant month.

To allow for the implementation of account based gaming and upgrades of other technology, there is a delayed commencement of up to 18 months for the provisions relating to account based gaming. The introduction of account based gaming will also provide the Gambling and Racing Commission and government with important data that can inform future policy work to prevent gambling harm.

In addition to the legislative framework for account based gaming, the bill will provide that clubs must enforce a break in play of 15 minutes after every hour of continuous play. Breaks in play are an important harm reduction measure, with research highlighting that the mandatory break in play of 15 minutes leads to individuals taking longer voluntary gaming pause. Mandatory breaks in play will encourage people to reflect on their gambling behaviours and interrupt continuous, possibly dissociative, gambling states.

Alongside mandatory account based cashless gaming, the bill includes a ban on ATMs at venues that have gaming machines. In 2025-26, money-seeking behaviours accounted for 95.8 per cent of the total gambling harm incidents measured in venues. While money-seeking behaviour has always been the most recorded sign of harm, its

proportion has increased from 66 per cent in 2023-24 to 85 per cent this year. EFTPOS and ATM withdrawals have also been a major focus of significant regulatory action and legal proceedings in the ACT over the past decade. The recent Hellenic Club decision in ACAT shows how severe the consequences of breaching EFTPOS withdrawal laws can be. Other regulatory matters can also demonstrate how clubs have continued to breach EFTPOS and ATM withdrawal limits on multiple occasions.

A ban on ATM facilities in venues provides a critical harm minimisation measure by reducing opportunities for people to access additional cash during a gambling session. This extends to a ban on ATMs located in related premises or ATMs within 500 metres of gambling venues operated by licensees. Today I will also sign an instrument to amend the Gaming Machine Regulation to ban EFTPOS withdrawals in venues. This regulation will commence six weeks after notification. The EFTPOS ban will allow for an immediate harm reduction measure while venues transition to account based gaming. The aim of this reform is to reduce the accessibility of additional cash for people choosing to play gaming machines so that there is a reduced risk of impulsive spending and gambling harm.

The bill also amends the Gaming Machine Act and other laws, as required, to reduce the number of gaming machines in the territory to 1,000 by 2045, with a mandated reduction of 500 machines every four years through the compulsory surrender of authorisations. These amendments continue the territory's long-term trajectory since 2018 of reducing the number of gaming machines in the ACT.

Reducing access to poker machines represents a longer term harm minimisation measure. The intent of sustained machine reductions is to decrease the density of machines in the territory. The evidence supports this approach. Reducing the number of machines can help lower the prevalence of moderate- to high-risk gambling, improve financial sustainability and reduce the social costs of gambling harm. Over time, this can lead to better health outcomes, stronger family relationships and reduced community burden. The reduction will occur through a phased scheme, providing a staged and predictable pathway towards achieving this target. By embedding a long-term reduction schedule in the statute books, the clubs industry will have a clear timeframe for machine reductions.

We know new gaming machines are more harmful and more addictive than ever before. Gaming operators are always developing new ways to entice more people to their machines. They use bright light and colours to make people think they are winning when, in fact, they are not, and we know that gambling companies will continue to create new ways to keep people on their machines for longer and spending more. That is why this bill will future-proof legislation and ensure that there are tighter harm reduction controls on more harmful machines.

The bill provides the necessary legislative architecture to enable additional requirements for licensees who update their network communications protocol. This may include the implementation of digital wallet based systems, similar to systems currently being trialled in New South Wales. The bill includes a variety of strict liability offences for licensees, including: failing to have an approved account based system; not identifying account holders; allowing a person to either not use a card, use multiple cards or use another person's card; allowing an excluded person to establish an account;

not complying with pre-commitment requirements; and failing to comply with the break-in-play requirements. The penalties highlight that the government takes a serious approach to reducing gambling harm and sends a message to gambling machine operators that there are consequences for failing to prevent harm in their venues.

I recognise that the reforms I have outlined will require clubs to adapt the way they operate and diversify their source of revenue. In recognition of this and in response to industry feedback, key elements of the bill will be implemented in stages, with commencement extending up to 18 months following notification to support a smooth and practical transition.

For too long, gambling harm has been treated as an unfortunate but unavoidable consequence of doing business. For too long, governments around Australia have acknowledged the harm, measured the harm and spoken about the harm but continued to allow communities to bear the brunt of that harm. Today this Assembly has an opportunity to choose a different path.

I call on all members of the Assembly to support this reform, to truly take the time to understand it and to share the responsibility that we have to the community to pursue this change. Future generations will judge us by whether we have the courage to protect people from preventable harm. Today we make a decisive step towards a safer, fairer and healthier Canberra. I commend the bill to the Assembly.

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

Better Regulation Legislation Amendment Bill 2026

Debate resumed from 6 May 2026 on motion by **Ms Cheyne**:

That this bill be agreed to in principle.

MR CAIN (Ginninderra) (12.07): Introduced in May this year, this bill makes government registers, including for food businesses, building stock notices and licensed professionals, freely accessible online and reduces unnecessary paperwork. The Canberra Liberals are supportive of this bill. I note that we will also be supporting the minor amendment that will be presented.

I note as well that the Standing Committee on Environment and Planning resolved in May not to undertake an inquiry. The scrutiny committee separately examined the human rights and legislative standards of the bill. In report 19 there was a request for comment from the government about whether there was an impact on reviewable decisions, and the minister responded in September, as recorded in report 21 of the scrutiny committee. The scrutiny committee was happy with that response. Otherwise, there was some commendation of the drafting of the explanatory material, and that is always good to hear.

As I have described broadly, the bill makes a range of minor technical changes—mostly, to my understanding, to make more information accessible to the public for a wide range of professional licensee holders and registrations. We will be supporting changes to 22 acts and four regulations as presented. With the rollout of such changes,

I will be very interested in how the registers are updated, in what manner, how accessible those registers will actually be, and when the changes will be made. I look forward to the minister addressing those issues.

MR BRADDOCK (Yerrabi) (12.09): I rise to speak to the Better Regulation Legislation Amendment Bill 2026 and outline my support for its intent and the reforms it seeks to deliver. Like other members noted, this is an omnibus bill that makes a wide range of minor and technical amendments across numerous acts and regulations. On the surface, many of these changes appear procedural or administrative, but collectively they reflect an important and deliberate effort to modernise our regulatory framework, reduce unnecessary burden, and improve how information is shared with the community.

At the heart of the bill are three clear objectives: improving public access to information, ensuring legislation remains fit for purpose, and aligning our laws with contemporary regulatory practice. These goals are foundational to good governance. In particular, transparency is a thread that runs strongly throughout this legislation. Public access to information is essential for accountability. It enables Canberrans to understand how regulatory systems operate, to scrutinise decisions, and to engage meaningfully in public life. Without that access, trust in government is eroded. The bill takes meaningful steps to strengthen that transparency through the expansion and formalisation of public registers.

The move to make a wide range of registers freely accessible online, covering areas such as food businesses, public health licences, gaming machine approvals, bookmaker licences and assistance animals will significantly improve the availability of important regulatory information. Access to this information will allow individuals to make informed decisions, whether it is choosing a food provider, verifying a licence or understanding a regulatory action in their community. It also strengthens consumer protection and acts as a safeguard against misconduct by enabling public scrutiny. Equally important is the decision to enshrine in legislation a number of registers that are already available in practice. This provides certainty and ensures that access to information is not dependent on administrative discretion but is instead embedded as an enduring legal requirement.

Alongside these transparency measures, the bill also seeks to reduce unnecessary regulatory burden, which appears to be a sensible and pragmatic approach. Allowing licences to be amended rather than cancelled and reissued, removing outdated requirements such as maintaining fax numbers, and modernising payment provisions are all practical steps that reduce administrative friction for both businesses and regulators. These changes should contribute to a more efficient and responsive regulatory system that reflects how people and organisations actually operate in 2026.

It is also important to reflect briefly on some of the shifts this bill introduces—in particular the move away from physical licences and certificates, such as those for food businesses or public health activities, in favour of digital registers as the primary source of truth. While this transition is consistent with modern regulatory practice, it raises questions about visibility of public confidence. Physical certificates have traditionally acted as a visible sign of compliance. Thus, replacing them with digital systems means that accessibility and usability of those systems become critically important. For this

reason, it will be essential that the government ensures those registers are not only technically available but also genuinely easy to navigate and keep up to date. Transparency is only meaningful if people can readily access and understand the information being provided.

Ultimately, I believe the direction of this bill is right. It reflects a method to streamline regulation while strengthening transparency and accountability. It recognises that effective regulation must evolve over time and adapt to new technologies and practices, as well as new expectations from the community. For these reasons, I acknowledge the intent behind these reforms and am pleased to support the bill.

MS CHEYNE (Ginninderra—Manager of Government Business, Attorney-General, Minister for City and Government Services, and Minister for Transport) (12.13), in reply: I thank members for their contributions to this debate. As you have heard, this bill is straightforward in its purpose: to make useful regulatory information easier to access, to remove unnecessary administrative requirements, and to modernise the statute book. We know that increasing transparency and access to information is critical for participation and trust in government.

This bill improves public access to regulatory information by enshrining in legislation electronic access and free accessibility to 10 public registers where information is already electronically available, as well as enshrining in legislation 14 new public registers which will be accessible electronically. These changes do not weaken regulatory standards; they remove paperwork and processes that do not improve safety or compliance, allowing businesses and regulators to focus on the requirements that do. These registers will allow Canberrans to find relevant information more easily. They will support informed choices, consumer protection and public accountability. We anticipate these registers will reduce the number of freedom of information requests seeking this sort of information. These requests are time and resource intensive on government agencies when we can simply make the information readily available, so we will.

I appreciate there has been a question of whether food business closure notices will no longer be physically displayed. I wish to clarify that the new electronic register of registered food businesses will make information about businesses that are registered food businesses under the Food Act publicly accessible online. However, a closure notice will still be required to be displayed at each public entrance to the premises of a food business if the business has a prohibition order issued relating to the sale or handling of food on the premises.

During the detail stage, I will present an amendment to ensure that all amendments to the Food Act and the Public Health Act have a delayed commencement of six months after the act's notification day. This amendment will ensure the continued proper functioning of the regulatory frameworks in these acts, including ensuring ongoing regulatory compliance and maintaining community safety while the new publicly available electronic registers are established.

The bill modernises legislative language by replacing specific references to cheques and credit cards with payment-neutral terms so that legislation can accommodate current and future payment methods. Amendments to the Pool Betting Act 1964 replace

gendered references with clearer gender-neutral language.

These amendments are varied, but they have a common purpose: they make information easier to find, remove unnecessary steps, and support effective regulation while keeping the ACT statute book current. This is measured and practical reform and it strengthens transparency and consumer protection while reducing avoidable costs for both businesses and government agencies. I commend the bill to the Assembly.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Bill agreed to in principle.

Detail stage

Bill, by leave, taken as a whole.

MS CHEYNE (Ginninderra—Manager of Government Business, Attorney-General, Minister for City and Government Services, and Minister for Transport) (12.16): I move amendment 1 circulated in my name [*see schedule 1 at page 3387*] and I table a supplementary explanatory statement to the amendment.

Amendment agreed to.

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

Bill, as amended, agreed to.

Sitting suspended from 12.17 to 2.00 pm.

Questions without notice Justice—legislation

MR PARTON: My question is to the Minister for Human Rights. Despite running equal last in the Australian Council on Smoking and Health table on the states and territories regarding the effectiveness of compliance in this space, your government has not moved in any meaningful way on closure laws. Last week, one of the government ministers cited human rights concerns as one of the things holding up this process. Can you explain how closing down an illegal tobacco retailer with likely links to organised crime would contravene that individual's human rights?

DR PATERSON: I will take that question seeing as those were my comments. Every minister in the ACT government has a requirement under law to implement a human rights framework. The Canberra Liberals should know this—they have been in this place long enough—yet they seem to have a really ad hoc application of human rights—

Mr Cocks: On a point of order. The minister has very quickly moved into debating the question.

MR SPEAKER: I have to agree with you; she has. I ask you to answer the question, not to debate what the Liberal Party's position may or may not be, please, Minister.

DR PATERSON: We apply a very rigorous human rights framework to every piece of legislation that we develop. As I said on radio last week, human rights is one part of the consideration. We look at the evidence broadly in terms of making the arguments for the bills that we develop.

We have been very clear and consistent. Minister Stephen Smith, when she introduced and passed the bill last year, was very clear that there would be a second tranche of legislation that would come at the end of this year. We have been entirely consistent, and consistent with the federal government, that there would be another tranche of legislation by the end of the year. We have been working with federal colleagues and counterparts as well as the tobacco commissioner around the legislation and what we are progressing. We will have legislation in December that will have serious criminal penalties and closure laws to address illicit tobacco and vapes.

MR PARTON: Despite talking a big talk, Minister, is it acceptable that the ACT is running equal last on the ACOSH table?

DR PATERSON: We have been very clear about the time lines for our legislation. Victoria only passed their closure laws five weeks ago. We are a smaller jurisdiction than other states. We have had to turn around significant firearms reform over the past year—unplanned reform. A significant focus of the Police Ministers Council has been firearms safety and tobacco reform. We are equally committed to both areas of reform and working with our federal colleagues.

MRS MORRIS: Minister, does the government's decision to not proceed with the promise of ankle bracelets for domestic violence offenders contravene the human rights of victims?

MS TOUGH: Mr Speaker, was that a new question or a supplementary?

MR SPEAKER: It was a supplementary.

MS TOUGH: Mrs Morris, could I ask you to repeat the question, please?

MRS MORRIS: Certainly. Does the government's decision to not proceed with the promise of ankle bracelets for domestic violence offenders contravene the human rights of victims?

Ms Orr: A point of order, Mr Speaker. I seek your guidance on whether the supplementary question is within the scope of the initial question, given that it was on human rights regarding illegal tobacco?

MR SPEAKER: It is questionable—I accept that—because the original question was specifically related to tobacco.

Mr Cocks: On the original point of order, Mr Speaker: the original question was in fact on the application of the human rights approach.

Members interjecting—

MR SPEAKER: It is line ball. I will get some advice from the Clerk on this.

Based on that advice, I am still of the view that it is line ball, but I am going to agree with the government on this one. I think that the question really did relate to the human rights and tobacco. I think that, although there is a human rights element to it, bending to ankle bracelets was a step beyond. So I accept the point of order. We will move to a new question.

Public schools—funding

MS LEE: My question is for the Minister for Education. Minister, data obtained from the *Canberra Times* showed the four specialist schools were facing a combined cut to their budget of almost \$10 million. You have repeatedly said, and I quote, “No specialist school will receive less funding in 2027 than in 2026,” citing the \$7 million in additional funding they will have access to but refusing to say where the shortfall of \$3 million will come from.

Minister, I will ask you again: if these schools are to receive a funding cut of almost \$10 million as reported, and you have stated publicly that they will have access to \$7 million in additional funding, where is the shortfall of almost \$3 million coming from?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I will refer Ms Lee to the last time I responded to this question in the last sitting week, and I was very clear. There is also an exceptions pool of funding that is available, which Ms Lee is well aware of, that can be used to support any shortfall. I really would encourage Ms Lee to stop scaremongering parents of children and young people in specialist schools. We have been clear that specialist schools will not see a reduction in funding from 2026 to 2027. There is both a specific allocation for specialist schools—

Opposition members interjecting—

Ms Orr: A point of order, Mr Speaker. I know the minister is not too bothered by the interjections, but I’m finding it hard to follow. There has been quite a few, and it’s the first sitting day of a two-week period.

Opposition members interjecting—

Ms Orr: They’re still going, Mr Speaker

MR SPEAKER: Members of the opposition, if you could just dial it down a bit, that would be helpful. Minister?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: There is both a specific allocation that is related to specialist schools, and there is an exceptions process to ensure that we are working through with every school so that they can deliver efficient, effective, excellent education to the students in the ACT and surrounding regions. I do not know how many more times I have to say this before Ms Lee will stop scaremongering parents of children and young people with disabilities.

Mr Cocks: A point of order.

MR SPEAKER: A point of order, Mr Cocks?

Mr Cocks: A point of order on the accusations of scaremongering; I think it has been discussed before that it was possibly unparliamentary. And the minister is moving into debating.

MR SPEAKER: I will give you one but not both. Scaremongering we are allowing, but I do agree that the minister has to answer the question. Minister, you do default into accusations about what the opposition may or may not be doing, and that is debating, so I would ask you not to do that.

MS LEE: Minister, can you please inform the Assembly of how much is in the “exceptions bucket”, as you have referred to it, and how that is to offset the almost \$50 million in cuts across the entire public school system?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: Again, as we have discussed, I do not know where Ms Lee got the \$50 million in cuts. We have allocated more than \$40 million in additional funding in 2026-27 versus 2025-26—in additional funding for the 2027 school year—and we have not reduced overall funding for the ACT public education system. Ms Lee is just wrong about that. She knows, and we have said publicly that the exceptions pool is \$8 million.

Opposition members interjecting—

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: But we also have other funding to support students with disability and to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, and we are working through budgets right now with principals and with schools. Last week the principals were asked to provide back a budget tool with some substantial information to the ACT Education Directorate. The vast majority of schools provided that information in detail last week. That is being worked through over the next couple of weeks, with an expectation that staffing profiles and budgets will be finalised in week 5 of this term.

MR COCKS: Minister, can you confirm, given your explanation just now, that the entire exceptions fund will go to specialist schools and therefore not be available for other public schools?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: No. I am not quite sure where the shadow Treasurer gets his maths from. If it were the case that it was a \$10 million gap—which I am not confirming, but if it were—and we had \$7 million specifically for specialist schools and we had another \$8 million, that would mean \$3 million of the \$8 million would be going to specialist schools, which would leave another \$5 million, so *prima facie* Mr Cocks is incorrect.

Public schools—funding

MS LEE: My question is to the Minister for Education, because she is doing a stellar

job at the moment!

Minister, data obtained by the *Canberra Times* shows some of the ACT's most disadvantaged schools are facing the largest budget cuts. Kingsford Smith School is set to lose almost \$3.5 million, Caroline Chisholm School around \$1.5 million and Theodore Primary School about eight per cent of its budget. Minister, your directorate has justified these cuts by saying there needed to be more focus on equity and need. If that is the case, why are some of our most disadvantaged schools facing the largest budget cuts?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: Thank you. I would again refer Ms Lee to the fact that has been repeatedly indicated that school budgets have not been finalised. I am very well aware that Kingsford Smith School had a significant additional injection of resources a couple of years ago to address the challenges that that school was facing. That has been effective, and that school is now doing very, very well, but the significant reduction that would be indicated by—

Ms Lee interjecting—

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: Mr Speaker, honestly.

MR SPEAKER: Ms Lee, I ask that you not do as many interjections, if at all, because you saw how it went last time.

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: Simply repeating it does not make it true.

We are very well aware that simply applying the student resource allocation to Kingsford Smith School would see the removal of that substantial increase in funding that had been allocated to that school to address the challenges it faced. That is why it was already on the list from the get-go, as a number of other schools were, as schools that would need to be worked through as part of this exceptions process and through the broader support process between the Education Directorate and schools. That is the process that we are currently working through. Any assertions that Ms Lee makes about reductions in funding to any school at this point are not accurate.

MS LEE: Minister, what specific modelling did the government use to determine that schools serving high levels of disadvantage should receive less funding, and will you release that modelling publicly?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: Ms Lee is welcome to have yet another briefing on school resourcing if she would like one. I have responded to questions on notice, and I am aware that I have got more yet to respond to in relation to the data that was available to the Education Directorate that determined the initial student resource allocation and adjustment-based resourcing model funding or budgets that were provided to schools, with very clear advice to principals that there were going to have to be adjustments and that the Education Directorate did not have all of the information available to it about the individual pressures that schools were going to be facing. This is because we are moving from a largely autonomous system to a more centralised system, and this is the first time that we have done budgets in this way. Based on the resourcing model—there is some information that has been made available, I believe, or may be made available

tomorrow on the Education Directorate website, and I have asked for further information about how that model works. Ms Lee, as the shadow education minister, I believe has had a briefing and can have another briefing. She can have as many briefings as she wants until she gets through her head what this model was and that we have another process that we are currently going through with principals.

MR PARTON: Minister, how can parents and students—and I will be meeting with in Theodore in the coming days—have confidence that these cuts are about equity rather than budget savings when schools with some of the highest levels of need are facing some of the largest budget cuts?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I just reject the premise of the Leader of the Opposition's question, because I have talked repeatedly about the process that we are going through. I think it is really important that principals understand, if we applied the model strictly and reallocated resources in the way that was recommended through the schools resourcing review, what the impact would be if we treated every school the same in terms of those resources. On the basis of the information that is available to the Education Directorate, that is what that outcome would look like. However, we have also said that we understand that each school is different and each school will have specific circumstances that need to be worked through with the Education Directorate, and that is the process that is currently underway. Seeing as he has asked for it, my advice to the Leader of the Opposition in meeting with Theodore Primary parents and the school community is this: do not scaremonger; actually reassure them that the Education Directorate is working closely with—

Mr Parton: Do you want to come with me?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I would love to come with you, Mr Parton. I have asked specifically to organise some meetings with P & Cs and other groups. I have met with ACT Parents a couple of times. I am happy to do that, but what I would really appreciate is if any member of this place is meeting with school communities, reassure them that we have heard what they are saying, we have heard their concern. I understand that this is a difficult time for school communities, but the Education Directorate is working with school leaders to ensure that they have the resourcing that they need to deliver excellent education to all of our students next year.

Public schools—staffing

MISS NUTTALL: My question is also to the Minister for Education. Minister, this week educators are having to take industrial action yet again, with actions and school closures all over Canberra every single morning this week. It is now more than 15 months since educators' claims were first lodged. Minister, when will the directorate resolve bargaining with the AEU so that no more strikes will be necessary?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I thank Miss Nuttall for the question. It is important and that is why we have been engaging very closely with the union to ensure we can settle bargaining as quickly as possible. Last week the Education Directorate had a full day workshop with the Australian Education Union ACT branch to talk about the staffing guarantee claim that the union has made, which is a high priority for them, and how that could potentially be resolved in a way that is acceptable to management, to the

union and to staff. They also had a separate meeting that went for a number of hours working through all of the claims and clause drafting that is currently going backwards and forwards between the union and the Education Directorate.

I believe the union has been clear that bargaining is now progressing well. We are certainly continuing to consider claims and we are really hoping to get a further offer to the union that goes through all of the clause drafting and claims in the next couple of weeks so that we can get this agreement out to ballot. I have heard very clearly from the union they would like this agreement to go out to ballot, and that is also our objective.

MISS NUTTALL: Minister, do you commit to resolving negotiations before the end of this school year so that strikes do not continue next year?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I thank Miss Nuttall for the question. We are certainly doing our best to achieve that.

MR BRADDOCK: Minister, how will the directorate be addressing the issue of split, collapsed and cancelled classes in their next offer?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I thank Mr Braddock for the supplementary. As I said in the response to the first question, there was a full day workshop last week with the union to talk about the staffing guarantee claim, which specifically addresses the issue of split and collapsed classes and how you ensure that schools are appropriately staffed when teachers are away, particularly when they are away unexpectedly.

The directorate had already provided a draft clause to the union that explicitly addressed split and collapsed classes. One of the things we need to understand better is what the incidence of split and collapse classes is, because the directorate does not have central information about that. We certainly understand that the incidence of those has been increasing and that is exactly what that conversation about the staffing guarantee claim is aimed to do. I understand that excellent progress was made in that workshop last week.

Public schools—funding

MS CLAY: My question is to the Minister for Education. Minister, during the last sitting period, you indicated that school budgets were not yet finalised, in response to questioning on school budget cuts. When asked about how many schools had accessed the exceptions process pool of \$8 million, you indicated that this “iterative process” was ongoing and that no schools had accessed the funds yet. Can you please provide an update on how many schools have accessed the exceptions funding pool process and what the criteria and process for accessing that are?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I thank Ms Clay for the question. As I indicated, there is currently a process underway. The principals completed a school budgeting tool last week. The vast majority of schools have provided that back to the directorate, or had yesterday, when I had my briefing. They are currently finalising what the assessment process looks like, to work through the exceptions process.

In answer to Ms Clay's first question, no schools have yet accessed that funding, because that process is still underway, and those criteria are being refined at the moment. There is a pretty clear initial set of criteria which cover the kinds of things that you would expect, in terms of work health and safety, financial sustainability, staffing issues et cetera. But those are currently being finalised, in terms of the exact wording and how that will be worked through the assessment panel process.

MS CLAY: Minister, are principals aware of those draft criteria, and when will those draft criteria be finalised?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: Those criteria will be finalised this week. I am not sure what conversations the directorate has had with the principals about that draft. I know that some people will have been involved in more detailed conversations. I will take on notice the question about what meetings have been had with principals about this. Regularly, there are drop-in sessions; there are communications with principals. I would encourage all principals to engage with their executive education lead. There are network meetings of principals in the specific networks with their EELs to talk through this process. All of this process is being done collaboratively with principals and, from this week, also with school communities, to undertake a risk assessment process.

MISS NUTTALL: Minister, principals have told us that they do not know about these criteria. What specific official communications have they received about the criteria for accessing funds?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: There is an ongoing conversation between the executive education leads for the networks of principals and the principals themselves. I have also heard, in relation to this, that principals have different levels of information in relation to this process and have been very clear with the directorate that they need to provide regular communication. That is one of the things that we have been talking about in our meetings: a rhythm of communication to principals and to school communities that will ensure that people understand all the information and the process that is occurring. Certainly, once the criteria and process are finalised, the Education Directorate will be communicating again with principals. But I would be very surprised if principals were not aware at this point that there is an exceptions process, given how much this has been talked about publicly, as well as the internal conversations.

Housing—debt to commonwealth

MR EMERSON: My question is to the Minister for Housing and Homelessness. During senate estimates hearings on 22 October 2019, while in opposition, Senator Gallagher criticised the federal coalition government for not agreeing to forgive the ACT's historic housing debt. She said, "You are in a position of power; you get to sign it off." Senator Gallagher is now the minister for finance, so she is in a position to sign it off. In 2013, the federal Labor government forgave the bulk of South Australia's historic housing debt, and in 2019 the federal Liberal government forgave Tasmania's historic housing debt. Between 1 July 2001 and 30 June 2025, the ACT made \$187.67 million in interest repayments alone, for this historic housing debt. Minister, since taking on the housing portfolio, given the scale of this issue, have you taken any steps

to get the debt waived? If so, what steps have you taken?

MS ORR: In regard to the historic housing debt, the ACT government has written multiple times to the federal government and had many ongoing discussions with them around waiving the housing debt.

Since coming into the portfolio, I have sought briefings on the representations that have been made and the opportunities for further representations. I am still considering how we may best progress those, as opposed to just repeating what has already been covered. I understand that there are ongoing discussions ongoing across multiple jurisdictions, who might make the same observations that Mr Emerson makes around these debts which are held by a number of jurisdictions. And, certainly, I am making enquiries with my counterparts in those jurisdictions, as to where there may be commonalities.

MR EMERSON: Minister, what is the current outstanding debt, and total interest repaid as of today?

MS ORR: I can provide the outstanding balance of the loan. It is not necessarily as of today, but for the 26-27—actually, I am just going to take that on notice and check because I do not have the numbers for today.

MS VASSAROTTI: Minister, do you accept that this debt exacerbates the fact that public housing in the ACT has been chronically under-funded—noting that our stock is in the second-worse condition in the country, according to the Productivity Commission?

MS ORR: I do not accept the premise of the question or the way it is presented. The ACT government has received significant funding over many years from the commonwealth government, through a range of programs, to invest in community and public housing. The ACT government has also undertaken its own initiatives through programs such as Growing and Renewing, to improve the public housing stock within the ACT and to establish a community housing provider ecosystem within the ACT. There has been a lot of work, and what I have come to really appreciate since taking on the portfolio is just how extensive that work is, around investing in our public housing.

The historic housing debt is a component of the overall portfolio and of the funding and the funding picture, but it is certainly not the only one and not the sole determinant of what investments are made.

Phillip—proposed 25-metre public pool

MS CARRICK: My question is to the Minister for Sports and Recreation. The existing Phillip pool is being replaced with a privately operated 25 metre public pool located in a major mixed-use development of around 700 apartments. Unlike a traditional government-owned public pool, key matters such as public access, opening hours, affordability, maintenance obligations and long-term operational responsibility will be determined through a future lease arrangement that has not yet been finalised. Minister, will the government publicly release the proposed lease conditions for community consultation before the existing pool is demolished, so that residents can be confident that public access, affordability, maintenance standards and long-term operations are

protected for future generations?

MR STEEL: I thank the member for her question. I will take it on notice to get some advice from the Territory Planning Authority as to whether they would typically—or have a requirement under the Planning Act to—release that information for consultation. Of course, there is a requirement in the Planning Act for development applications to go on notification to provide an opportunity for the community to view those and make their comments through to the Territory Planning in making the decisions that they need to on development applications in relation to the design and siting DAs but also lease variation DAs. I understand there would be a requirement for one on this site and it would need to be notified.

MS CARRICK: Minister, if the operator determines that the pool is no longer commercially viable, who would be responsible for meeting operating deficits and ensure that the pool remains open? Will the lease require the owner to underwrite any losses, or is there a risk that ACT ratepayers will ultimately be asked to subsidise a privately-operated facility?

MR STEEL: There is a requirement in the Territory Plan for there to be a 25-metre indoor pool on this site, as well as other associated aquatic facilities. So it would then fall to Access Canberra to undertake enforcement of the lease on the site. In the meantime, the government is also undertaking planning on a government-owned pool, which is intended to be an 50-metre outdoor pool and would have other facilities as well. Work is underway for planning and looking for a site for the location of that facility. So it is intended that there would be multiple pools in Woden, to meet the growing needs of the population into the future.

Ms Carrick: Point of order, Mr Speaker. The question was about who would underwrite any losses of the 25-metre Geocon pool to ensure that it remains operating and that we do not have an empty commercial space.

MR SPEAKER: I thought the minister answered that by saying that it would be part of the lease conditions that they were required to do it. Minister, do you have anything further to add?

MR STEEL: No.

MS CLAY: Can the minister assure the Assembly that this proposal is not going to end up as a derelict facility like Big Splash?

MR STEEL: I thank the member for her question. Certainly the indications are, through the development application, that there will be substantial investment in a new pool that is available and open to the public on the site. This is welcome because, for a very long time—over several decades—there has been a concern about the state of that facility. In the early part of this century, there was an Assembly inquiry that looked at the future of the Phillip pool and noted significant concern over the viability of the facility in its current state and the need for investment in it. It also talked about the option of having an indoor pool to make it more viable all year round. So this has been an ongoing conversation. But now we have a proposal that has come forward. Of course, it needs to be assessed throughout the various stages of the development by the

Territory Planning Authority.

The government is also committed to looking at another pool in the Woden Valley to serve the community as well. We will be making sure that we own a pool in the Woden Valley for use by the community and there will be private facilities as well. This is not the only private pool facility in Woden. Of course, there is the Stellar facility, owned by the Southern Cross Club in Phillip as well. So there are other pools around. But the government is also looking to own a pool in the Woden Valley area, and work is underway at the moment on the siting for that pool.

ACT Policing

MS CASTLEY: My question is to the minister for police. Minister, there are significant and growing concerns about crime throughout my electorate of Yerrabi. When passing these on to the Minister and her office, I have sought increased police patrols in areas such as Amaroo, Franklin, Harrison, Kaleen, Taylor, and the town centre. Could the minister please inform the chamber whether she passes on these requests to ACT Policing and what expectations she has about how they respond?

DR PATERSON: I absolutely do pass on all the correspondence that I get from the community and from other MLAs regarding policing operations. I do not direct police operationally. It is a decision for ACT Policing in terms of where they undertake operations or patrols, or how they assess the need and risk in certain areas. That is often the advice that I get back to respond to MLAs who have these requests—that it is a matter for ACT Policing.

MS CASTLEY: Does the minister seek or receive any follow-ups from ACT Policing about the actions they have taken in response to requests from members?

DR PATERSON: I have weekly briefings with ACT Policing around the issues that police are coming into contact with out in the community. They will raise with me issues if they are seeing particular incidents and particular hotspots. A good example was when we were seeing the ovals being torn up by dirt bikes and things. That was raised with me, obviously through policing but also through the community, and then we discussed how we were going to address that and what police actions were going to be taken.

Ms Castley: A point of order. The question was whether she receives briefings after incidents that have been—

MR SPEAKER: I think there is a point of order here, because it is about whether you get a response to the correspondence rather than more generally on their operations.

DR PATERSON: Yes, and I reply to members with the advice from ACT Policing, and they will determine whether they think there are extra crime incidents occurring in a particular area that they need to focus on. If that is the circumstance, then I will receive follow-up briefings on the issue and continue to receive updates.

Corrections—electronic monitoring of alleged offenders

MRS MORRIS: My question is to the Minister for Corrections.

Minister, last week your government decided to break another promise of introducing electronic monitoring to protect victims of domestic and family violence. The government undertook a feasibility study that found a full monitoring scheme had an annual cost of \$18 million, and high costs were ultimately cited as the reason for scrapping the program. Minister, what financial and public safety benefits did the feasibility study identify from implementing the scheme?

MS TOUGH: I thank Mrs Morris for the question. The ACT government remains broadly supportive of electronic monitoring as a community corrections tool and has undertaken significant work to understand how an electronic monitoring scheme could operate here in the territory. As Mrs Morris mentioned, extensive feasibility work has been undertaken, including market testing and stakeholder consultation with the domestic violence sector and more broadly across the community. It included consultation on the change of policy frameworks, including legal, human rights, police, corrections, domestic and family violence and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander justice sectors. It looked at the—

Mrs Morris: Point of order: just on relevance, my question went specifically to the financial and safety benefits that the feasibility study found. I do not believe the minister has been directly relevant to that.

MR SPEAKER: Not yet. She is providing background information to the feasibility study. I am sure she is going to go directly to that now.

MS TOUGH: Going to the costing, the government found that because we do not have an electronic monitoring system as part of community corrections here in the ACT like other state and territory jurisdictions, the feasibility study also included the initial setup costs of a system and the base costs to monitor what was a relatively small number of offenders under community corrections supervision in the ACT community. Discussions with the sector confirmed that domestic violence perpetrators were not the place to start electronic monitoring within the ACT community. It is something to build up to with an electronic monitoring system in the ACT. All these things together have led the government to the decision that electronic monitoring is not feasible at this time for domestic violence.

MRS MORRIS: Minister, what is the current average monetary cost of preventing a single domestic and family violence incident?

MS TOUGH: The ACT government invests in a broad range of domestic and family violence priorities in our community, from frontline services supporting our domestic, family and sexual violence services through to education and prevention programs. Key investments have included critical services for our victim-survivors through the Domestic Violence Crisis Service, CRCC, the YWCA and so many other services to victim-survivors. We have continued to invest this budget in domestic and family—

Mrs Morris: Point of order, Mr Speaker: again, it was just a simple question. I was just asking for the current average monetary cost of preventing an incident of domestic family violence. The minister has not addressed that; she has gone to talk about

investments that the government has made.

MR SPEAKER: On the point of order, we have an answer on that.

MS TOUGH: Domestic and family violence, as Mrs Morris knows, is an extremely complex area in our community. There is no one single measure that helps someone or cost that goes to stopping family and domestic violence in our community. The government invests in prevention, it invests in education, it invests in frontline services and in our justice system because all of this together is how the government and the community together will work to stop and prevent family and domestic violence in our community. It is no one cost; it is a broad range of measures across our entire community that we are working on for stopping family and domestic violence.

Mr Cocks: Point of order: under 118AA, I do not believe the minister has actually answered the question about the average monetary cost of preventing a single domestic and family violence incident; rather, she has instead suggested that there are a range of costs.

MR SPEAKER: I think she responded to the question. She said there is not a singular cost. She said that there are a range of measures and that it is more complex than that. She has responded I think, Mr Cocks, and I think she has responded adequately.

MR CAIN: Minister, will you table the feasibility study and any other analysis that was relevant to this decision in the Assembly? If not, why? If so, when?

MS TOUGH: I will take on notice Mr Cain's questions about what can be tabled and when we can table it, but I am happy to share with the Assembly and the broader community the decisions and the consultation that are being made.

Corrections—enterprise bargaining

MRS MORRIS: My question is to the Minister for Corrections. Minister, Canberra's prison officers have announced their intention to strike on 29 October, for the first time, citing a failure by your directorate to offer a reasonable pay deal. Minister, what actions are you taking to ensure that, if industrial action takes place, operational security will be maintained and prison staff, prisoners and the community are kept safe during disruptions?

MS TOUGH: I thank Mrs Morris for the question. I support all workers in taking their entitlements to industrial action. I think it is a really fundamental thing that people can exercise their right to take industrial action.

In the correction space, it does pose challenges around the safety of staff and detainees and the legislative requirements that underpin a functional corrections system. I know that Corrections are working closely with corrections officers ahead of any planned industrial action to ensure that all legislative requirements are met during any times of industrial action and that the safety of the detainees and the corrections officers who remain on site during that time are paramount, so that everyone is safe, the legal requirements are undertaken and employees are able to engage in industrial action, as they are entitled to do so.

MRS MORRIS: Minister, what actions are you taking to resolve the dispute before the strike occurs on 29 October?

MS TOUGH: I thank Mrs Morris for the question. I am frequently engaged with my corrections officials for updates on how bargaining is going and understanding where claims are at from the CPSU union and from corrections. I am working with them so the bargaining process can occur as required.

MR CAIN: Minister, do you retain confidence in your directorate's handling of this bargaining process?

MS TOUGH: Yes.

Crime—knife-related crime

MRS MORRIS: My question is to the Minister for Police, Fire and Emergency Services. Minister, this month we have already seen the stabbing of two teenagers in Calwell, an alleged samurai knife attack, and the stabbing of a young man in Belconnen. Additionally, the AFPA identified 15 knife-related incidents across Canberra in the first six months of 2026, yet the government repeatedly refuses to implement any proactive measures to help prevent knife-related crime, such as Jack's Law. Minister, when will the government act and give ACT Policing the tools and powers they need to help prevent knife-related crime?

DR PATERSON: Yes, some quite disturbing incidents have occurred across the community, and our thoughts are with the families and the individuals involved in those incidents. I would like to thank ACT Policing for responding to those incidents. There is law reform underway that the Attorney-General is progressing around wand and around providing further powers to police to wand individuals for knives.

MRS MORRIS: Minister, does the government care about the victims of knife-related crime or only the human rights of criminals who commit knife-related crime?

DR PATERSON: I very much reject that question. As I said in answer to the first question, we care very deeply when these types of crimes occur in our community. Knife crime is deeply disturbing and incredibly dangerous, so we want to see a reduction in this type of crime. We will continue to work on our legislative framework, in terms of how we address knife crime.

MR CAIN: Minister, how many more knife crime victims will it take before you take some prompt and immediate action?

DR PATERSON: As I said, the Attorney-General is progressing legislation to address this exact issue.

Carers—support

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: My question is to the Minister for Community Services. Minister, last week was National Carers Week. Can you outline the importance of carers

to the ACT, and what actions the ACT government has taken to support these vital community members?

MS TOUGH: I thank Mr Werner-Gibbings for his question. As Mr Werner-Gibbings knows, last week, 11-17 October, was National Carers Week, when we honour and acknowledge the important work that our carers do in our community each and every day. This year's theme, "Care for a Carer: Making Carers Visible" highlights and reminds us that carers are often the unseen backbone of our communities and support systems. It calls on us—government, organisations, employers, families and communities—to ensure carers themselves are seen, heard and supported. So, I want to take this opportunity to thank all the carers in our community and acknowledge the work that they do each and every day.

While we can quote statistics in this place, around the number of hours of care provided every year and how many carers there are in our community, it does not do justice to the impact of the contribution all our carers make—and continue to make.

Mr Werner-Gibbings asked how the government is continuing to support carers. I am really pleased to say the ACT government is continuing to partner with Carers ACT to deliver the ACT Carer Strategy and its final action plan which I released during Carers Week last week. Through this plan, we will continue to improve recognition of carers, increase community awareness and strengthen access to services and supports. The government is committed to making carers more visible and ensuring they receive the support they need.

I want to thank the previous minister for community service, Minister Orr, for the work she has put into the Carers Strategy and the Carers Action Plan before I took on the portfolio.

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: Minister, can you outline the actions the ACT government committed to as part of the final action plan for the ACT Carers Strategy?

MS TOUGH: I thank Mr Werner-Gibbings for the supplementary. The final action plan of the ACT Carers Strategy outlines nine key actions to deliver on four priority areas which include: improving access to services and supports for carers; strengthening recognition of carers and raising community awareness on the important work carers do; supporting our younger carers; and enhancing the data coordination and system capability.

To deliver on these areas, the nine actions include: exploring options for a purpose-built carer wellbeing and respite hub—including identifying options for a potential site, and working with Carers ACT to do; exploring the feasibility of a mentoring program that supports our young carers to continue their education and find meaningful employment; strengthening collaboration with advisory bodies and organisations representing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, culturally and linguistically diverse communities and LGBTIQ+ communities to identify carers and enable the sharing of de-identified carer data and insights; and promoting the carer-inclusive workplace initiative to the ACT public service staff to encourage workplaces to use the resources to collectively support colleagues who are carers. Importantly, this action plan has been designed, and will be delivered in partnership with carers and their representative bodies, like Carers

ACT.

To support this important work, I am pleased that the 2026-27 provides support for the advocacy for carers of people with disability, ensuring that carers' voices and experiences are reflected in policies, programs and services.

MS BERRY: Minister, how will the government continue to deliver for carers beyond 2028 and ensure that vital supports continue?

MS TOUGH: I thank Ms Berry for the supplementary. I and the ACT government remain committed to ensuring that carers are recognised and supported now and well into the future. As we work through the final action plan, we are reviewing the implementation of the current strategy with a focus on whether or not it achieved the objectives that we set out, and how we can take those learnings and lock in achievements, and build on that success with our carers in the community.

Most importantly, we will ensure we continue to build upon the close collaborations that we have built over this term of the current strategy. It is only through this kind of collaboration across government, across the community sector, across education providers and employers, and across our community more generally that we can achieve the kinds of results we need, to support carers in our community. It is on all of us in this place and across the ACT to work together so that carers are seen, and they are heard and they are valued—and make sure that those who support others are supported themselves.

Public schools—funding

MR BRADDOCK: My question is to the Minister for Education. Minister, during estimates, you and the Education Directorate's Director-General, Ms Jo Wood, indicated that the directorate would be providing a road map for the implementation of the recommendations of the resourcing review "by September". Minister, it is now October and we have not received any communications on this road map. Why hasn't this road map been released and when will it be?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I thank Mr Braddock for the question. The Education Directorate had previously indicated that they were intending to release an implementation plan by the end of September. We have done some further work in relation to bringing together the implementation of the schools resourcing review, the Stronger Foundations work and the Inclusive Education Strategy and have had a roundtable with public education stakeholders where we discussed a draft road map. The clear feedback that we received was that there was further work that was required, both to provide some further detail but also to restructure the way that that was being envisaged. Therefore, yes, that has not been released at this point; that work is ongoing. I thank Mr Braddock for the opportunity to provide that update.

MR BRADDOCK: Minister, will that road map, when finalised, be published? When is that likely to happen?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: Yes, absolutely. We are referring to it as an implementation plan. Yes, it will be published. I cannot provide a firm time line on that. Obviously, the

officials who are engaged in this work are also very busily engaged in the work to finalise school budgets by week 5, including undertaking a range of risk assessment processes as that work is done between the Education Directorate and schools, including in relation to the inclusion work, support for students with disability, work health and safety, staffing and other factors. So I think this work will be being done somewhat in the background while school budget work is being finalised.

But I do want to reassure Mr Braddock and the rest of the Assembly that the work is continuing in terms of the implementation of Stronger Foundations, the Inclusive Education Strategy and the response to the schools resourcing review. But, in terms of putting that into a document, that is probably going to take a few more weeks than we expected.

MS VASSAROTTI: When will the Education Directorate prioritise transparency and accountability with the review's recommendations? Will we be able to get a final timeline around the release of this road map?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I thank Ms Vassarotti for the question, but I am disappointed about the way that she has phrased it. Minister Berry released an interim government response to the report very quickly with the public school system resourcing review that provided the direction that the government was intending to go. We then had the round table with public education stakeholders on 25 September. We have recognised very clearly the scale of change that will be required and are committed to supporting staff and school communities through staged and carefully managed implementation.

This is a very big reform process. The Education Directorate is reprioritising existing resources to uplift its implementation capability to deliver on these commitments over the next two years. While I recognise that the directorate has not met the initial expectation around delivering an implementation plan by the end of September, I think everyone in this place would understand that there is a lot of work underway currently in the directorate. I am certainly supportive of our very hardworking public servants in ensuring that we get this process right and we take account of all of the other pressures in the system as we undertake this work. Ms Vassarotti would be very well aware of my ongoing commitment to transparency, and I will bring that to this work as well.

Justice and Community Safety Directorate—employee found to have engaged in serious corrupt conduct

MS BARRY: My question is to the Attorney-General. Attorney, earlier this year, the Integrity Commission released its long-awaited Operation Kingfisher report. The report found that Joshua Ceramidas has engaged in serious corrupt conduct. The report found that Mr Ceramidas's actions could, "constitute serious disciplinary offences or provide reasonable grounds for dismissing Mr Ceramidas or dispensing with or otherwise terminating his services"

Attorney-General, is Mr Ceramidas still employed in the Justice and Community Safety Directorate, and if not, when did his employment end?

MS CHEYNE: Mr Speaker, perhaps I might seek your ruling, but, nevertheless, I will not be commenting on an individual's employment arrangements. It would not be

appropriate.

MR SPEAKER: I do not think there is any parliamentary ruling on that in terms of the standing orders, but if that is your decision, then that is an answer—

Mr Cain: Take it on notice?

MR SPEAKER: No; she is saying that she is not going to answer it because it relates to an individual—

Ms Barry: So she doesn't know who is employed in her directorate?

MR SPEAKER: That is her answer Ms Barry—

Opposition members interjecting—

MR SPEAKER: Is there a supplementary, Ms Barry?

MS BARRY: Is Mr Ceramidas still employed in the Justice and Community Safety Directorate, given serious findings of serious corrupt conduct?

MS CHEYNE: I will seek advice, Mr Speaker, but I think it would set an extraordinary precedent for any person in this place to be commenting on an individual's employment arrangements.

MR CAIN: Attorney-General, are you aware of any other individuals in addition to Mr Ceramidas who have been found guilty of corrupt or criminal behaviour and are still employed in your directorate?

MR SPEAKER: Attorney-General?

Mr Cain: You can take it on notice if you like.

MS CHEYNE: Fine. I take it on notice.

Majura Primary School—funding

MS VASSAROTTI: My question is to the Minister for Education. Minister, the Majura Primary School community is deeply disappointed that your recent modernisation announcement fell well short of expectations following years of broken promises. The comprehensive school infrastructure plan recommended by the school resourcing review is still yet to be seen or scheduled. While the government promised a full school refurbishment, all it has delivered is a contract with Projex Building Group for a new library, completely ignoring the top consultation priorities like heating and cooling, which parents warned in 2025 left classrooms below safety standards. Minister, when will urgent heating, cooling and classroom improvements actually be delivered for students at Majura Primary?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I am not sure that Ms Vassarotti is correct in relation to the works underway. What I can advise is that the Majura Primary School modernisation

upgrade works will be commencing in late 2026. I will see if I can find some more information in relation to the detail of those works.

What I can say, having had a number of conversations with Majura Primary parents and the community during the 2024 election, when this was quite a significant issue, is that I recognise that parents and the school community at the time felt that they had not been appropriately consulted by the Education Directorate and that they were not happy with the direction that the project was heading in at that time. The commitment that has now been made and the modernisation project that is now committed to and that is commencing in late 2026 does directly respond to the feedback that was received through the subsequent engagement with the school community last year.

MS VASSAROTTI: We understand that the directorate has said that they will only release the heating and cooling infrastructure audit by the end of this year rather than delivering actual upgrades. What is the directorate preparing for classrooms in time for this summer?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: Can Ms Vassarotti please repeat the question, which I think had a preamble, so I only want the question.

MR SPEAKER: That is a fair comment. A supplementary does not have a preamble, so you just need to ask the question without a preamble or rephrase it.

MS VASSAROTTI: What is the directorate preparing for classrooms in time for this summer around heating and cooling?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: The heating and cooling programs are underway. Obviously this is something where we would all like for everything to be able to be done all at once, but the directorate is working with Infrastructure Canberra to procure and deliver tier 3 school infrastructure projects right now, which include heating and cooling upgrades at Weetangera Primary School, Latham Primary School, Hawker Primary School and Wanniasa Hills Primary School through the Electrification of Government Gas Assets Program and the \$15 million public school heating and cooling fund. It is a fact that you can both be doing work to assess the needs right across our school infrastructure portfolio and implementing changes at the same time, and that is exactly what is occurring.

MS CLAY: Minister, when will the comprehensive school infrastructure plan be released in line with recommendation 18 of the resourcing review?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: That is something that we are working through in relation to the full response and implementation plan for the public school system resourcing review in terms of how we stage and time this work. I am not able to answer that question at this point in time, but that information will be available later this year as we release the implementation plan.

Transport Canberra—passenger experience

MS BERRY: Thank you, Mr Speaker, I know you have been waiting for this one. It

has been 12 years.

My question is to the Minister for Transport. Minister, can you please update the Assembly on how the ACT government is working to improve public transport services from the passenger's perspective?

MR SPEAKER: Well worth waiting for.

MS CHEYNE: I warmly thank Ms Berry for the question.

For passengers, a good public transport system is not just about whether a bus or light rail service operates. It is whether it turns up when expected, whether the information is accurate, whether paying the fare is straightforward and whether people can get where they need to go with confidence. That is the lens through which I am applying my efforts to this portfolio.

We are preparing for the testing and commissioning of light rail stage 2A which will obviously impact the bus network and we are planning for the bus network following the completion of works on Commonwealth Avenue Bridge next year. But there is also plenty that we can improve about the experience of using the network that we have today. That includes more reliable journey planning, accurate timetables and real-time information, clearer communications when services are disrupted and making it easier for passengers to find the information and the assistance that they need.

Transport Canberra is developing a new customer service plan and it will be drawing directly on recommendations from the Public Transport Association of Canberra as well as the experiences of frontline staff.

And we are taking a much more disciplined approach to resolving outstanding issues with MyWay+. I have made it clear directly to NEC that I expect clear responsibilities, stronger escalation arrangements and transparent reporting against measurable outcomes. I do recognise that people's confidence in the system has been affected and that rebuilding it requires more than promises about future improvements. Ultimately, I want passengers to spend less time worrying about whether their bus is coming, whether their information is correct or whether they have been charged the right fare. It should be something Canberrans can always rely on without having to think twice about it.

MS BERRY: Minister, what action is the government taking to improve MyWay+ and ensure its contractor delivers the standard of service passengers deserve?

MS CHEYNE: I thank Ms Berry for the supplementary. While MyWay+ has improved since its launch, there are still significant issues to resolve, and I am not satisfied with how long some of those issues have been taking.

Earlier this month, as I foreshadowed last month, I met directly with NEC's Australian CEO, Keith Morrison, and the Chief Commercial Officer, Milan Djuricic. I told them that the relationship needed a reset and that I expected a fundamental and measurable improvement in accountability, transparency and delivery. Importantly, NEC has in its response affirmed its end-to-end responsibility for the contracted system, including the

work of its delivery partners. Passengers should not have to navigate the complexities of different suppliers and nor should Transport Canberra, its staff and its drivers. We contracted for an integrated system and that is what I expect NEC to deliver.

NEC has now proposed a dedicated remediation program with named responsibilities and clearer escalation pathways. Transport Canberra and Digital Canberra are working through that proposal before those arrangements are agreed. The test I am applying to this work is evidence of improvement, not another round of assurances. For NEC to demonstrate that it can be the reliable partner that the territory needs will depend on whether passengers and whether Transport Canberra staff experience a materially better service.

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: Minister, how is the government working with public transport users to identify and deliver practical improvements to the passenger experience?

MS CHEYNE: I think one of the clearest lessons, and clearest documented lessons, from MyWay+ is that consulting passengers is not enough if their feedback does not genuinely influence what gets delivered. The Public Transport Association of Canberra has recently provided an excellent detailed report on customer service, identifying practical improvements that would make a real difference to people's everyday journeys. Some of these are relatively straightforward: clearer information at bus stops, more accurate timetables, better journey planning, a more usable website and better communication when services change or things go wrong, which they can do. I have asked Transport Canberra to work directly with the association, as well as with our frontline customer experience staff, to turn this feedback into practical priorities through the new customer service plan.

I also want us to do a much better job of testing changes with the people who will actually use them, particularly passengers with a disability, older Canberrans, families and others who may face barriers to accessing our services. Importantly, I want us to close the loop with passengers, so they can see what has changed as a result of their feedback.

Justice and Community Safety Directorate—employee found to have engaged in serious corrupt conduct

MS BARRY: My question is to the Attorney-General. Attorney-General, I refer to the legal action commenced by Joshua Ceramidas against the Integrity Commission in the Federal Court, including the case management hearing held on Friday. Attorney-General, is the ACT government paying the legal fees of Mr Ceramidas in this action against the Integrity Commission? If so, how much are the fees?

MS CHEYNE: I want to be absolutely confident in my answer, so I will take the question on notice.

MS BARRY: Attorney-General, have you received a request to be a respondent in this matter? If so, what was your response to that request?

MS CHEYNE: I would like to seek some legal advice on this before I respond to the

chamber. I will take it on notice.

MR CAIN: Attorney-General, could you also provide advice on what role, of any type or character at all with this legal matter, you or any of your directorate are taking?

MS CHEYNE: I will take it on notice.

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

Supplementary answer to a question without notice Phillip—25-metre pool

MR STEEL: Earlier in question time, Ms Carrick asked me about consultation with the community in relation to lease variations at the Phillip pool site. The Territory Planning Authority has advised that, when a lease variation DA is lodged, it will be subject to public notification and this will allow members of the public to have their say on any proposed changes to the lease provisions, but a lease variation application is yet to be lodged for that site.

Majura Primary School—funding

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I have further information in relation to Majura Primary School. As indicated, regarding the project that Ms Vassarotti was referring to, the Projex Building Group has been contracted to deliver the library and new administration area. It is part of the wider plan for Majura Primary School modernisation. That includes upgrading classrooms, improving heating and cooling, and refurbishing bathrooms across the more than 60-year-old school. A separate contractor will be engaged to deliver future stages of the work.

I am advised that the delivery strategy was developed in consultation with the school to ensure their operational requirements were considered, including staging where modernisation work such as bathroom upgrades are expected to commence before the end of this year. Infrastructure Canberra and the Education Directorate will provide an update to the school board and P&C meetings later this month and will continue to keep the community updated throughout the project via forums such as the school newsletter.

Papers

Mr Speaker presented the following papers:

Annual Reports (Government Agencies) Act, pursuant to section 15—Annual Report 2025-2026—

ACT Auditor-General's Report No 8/2026, dated 8 October 2026.

ACT Electoral Commission, dated 10 September 2026.

ACT Integrity Commission, dated October 2026, together with a corrigendum.

ACT Ombudsman & Inspector of the ACT Integrity Commission, dated 12 October 2026.

Office of the Legislative Assembly, dated October 2026.

Auditor-General Act, pursuant to section 17—Auditor-General’s Report No 9/2026—Road Maintenance, dated 9 October 2026.

Freedom of Information Act, pursuant to section 67—A report on the operation of the *Freedom of Information Act 2016*—ACT Ombudsman—Annual Report 2025-2026, undated.

Bills, referred to Committees, pursuant to standing order 174—Correspondence—

Bills—Inquiry—

Domestic Violence Agencies Amendment Bill 2026—Letter to the Speaker from the Chair, Standing Committee on Legal Affairs, dated 16 October 2026.

Gambling and Racing Control (Gambling Exclusion) Amendment Bill 2026—Letter to the Speaker from the Chair, Standing Committee on Economic, Industry and Recreation, dated 30 September 2026.

Property Developers Legislation Amendment Bill 2026—Letter to the Speaker from the Chair, Standing Committee on Economics, Industry and Recreation, dated 30 September 2026.

Bills—Not inquired into—

Building and Construction Legislation Amendment Bill 2026— Letter to the Speaker from the Chair, Standing Committee on Economics, Industry and Recreation, dated 30 September 2026.

Competition Legislation Amendment Bill 2026— Letter to the Speaker from the Chair, Standing Committee on Public Accounts and Administration, dated 28 September 2026.

Housing and Consumer Affairs Legislation Amendment Bill 2026— Letter to the Speaker from the Chair, Standing Committee on Legal Affairs, dated 14 October 2026.

Road Transport (Safety and Traffic Management) (Validation) Amendment Bill 2026— Letter to the Speaker from the Chair, Standing Committee on Transport and City Services, dated 3 September 2026.

Victims of Crime Legislation Amendment Bill 2026—Letter to the Speaker from the Chair, Standing Committee on Legal Affairs, dated 14 October 2026.

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

e-Pet 032-26 and Pet 048-26—Inquiry into the Collapse of Gungahlin United Football Club—Letter to the Speaker from the Chair, Standing Committee on Economics, Industry and Recreation, dated 30 September 2026.

e-Pet 033-26 and Pet 040-26—Funding and multi-year support to Women's Shed, Canberra—letter to the Speaker from the Chair, Standing Committee on Social Policy, dated 13 October 2026.

e-Pet 047-26—Inclusion of Woden Valley Soccer Club in the National Premier League (NPL) Girls—Letter to the Speaker from the Chair, Standing Committee on Economics, Industry and Recreation, dated 30 September 2026.

e-Pet 005-26, Pet 053-26 and Pet 059-26—Save senior fitness programs at CIT Bruce—Letter to the Speaker from the Chair, Standing Committee on Social Policy, dated 13 October 2026.

Privileges 2026—Select Committee—Report—Inquiry into possible contempt of an Assembly Committee—ACT Public Sector Standards Commissioner’s response to recommendation, dated 6 October 2026.

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

Annual Reports (Government Agencies) Act, pursuant to section 13—Annual Report—

2025-2026—

ACT Gambling and Racing Commission, dated 24 September 2026.

ACT Human Rights Commission, dated 2 October 2026.

ACT Inspector of Custodial Services, dated October 2026.

ACT Insurance Authority, dated 23 September 2026.

ACT Policing Special Purposes, dated 25 September 2026.

ACT Policing, dated 25 September 2026.

Building and Construction Industry Training Fund Authority, dated 9 September 2026.

Canberra Health Services, undated.

Chief Minister Treasury and Economic Development Directorate (3 volumes), dated 24 September 2026.

City and Environment Directorate, dated 4 September 2026.

City Renewal Authority, dated 22 September 2026.

Cultural Facilities Corporation, dated 29 September 2026.

Digital Canberra Directorate, dated 29 September 2026.

Director of Public Prosecutions, dated 3 October 2026.

Education Directorate, dated 18 September 2026.

Health and Community Service Directorate, dated 29 September 2026.

Icon Water Limited, dated 29 September 2026.

Independent Competition and Regulatory Commission, dated 2 September 2026.

Infrastructure Canberra, dated 2 October 2026.

Justice and Community Safety Directorate, dated 2 October 2026.

Legal Aid Commission (ACT), dated 22 September 2026.

Long Service Leave Authority, dated 22 September 2026.

Office of the Commissioner for Sustainability and the Environment, dated 31 August 2026.

Office of the Work Health and Safety Commissioner (WorkSafe ACT), dated 8 September 2026.

Public Trustee and Guardian, dated 22 September 2026.

State of the Service, dated 23 September 2026.

Suburban Land Agency, dated 22 September 2026.

Auditor-General Act—Auditor-General’s Report No 6/2026—ACT Corrective Services rostering—Government response, dated October 2026.

Environment and Planning—Standing Committee—No 8—Inquiry into the Planning (Missing Middle Housing) Amendment Bill 2026—Government response, dated October 2026.

Integrity Commission Act—Investigation Report—Operation Kingfisher—An investigation into whether the procurement for the Campbell Primary School Modernisation Project was conducted with probity and whether it was affected by corrupt conduct, dated 23 July 2026.—Government response, dated October 2026.

Integrity Commission and Statutory Office Holders—Standing Committee—

Report 7—Inquiry into the effectiveness of transparency arrangements for Members of the Legislative Assembly—Final Report—Government response, dated September 2026.

Report 8—Inquiry into the operation of the 2024 ACT Election and Electoral ACT—Final Report—Government response, dated October 2026.

Light Rail Stage 2A—Business Engagement Report—January to March 2026.

Multicultural Communities—Facility—Support—Assembly resolution of 22 October 2025—Government response, dated October 2026.

Official Visitor Act, pursuant to section 23DA(2)—Official Visitors Scheme—Annual Report 2025-26, undated, together with a tabling statement.

Planning Act, pursuant to subsection 268(2)—Statement of Leases Granted—1 July to 30 September 2026, dated October 2026.

Private Health Insurance Rebate—Assembly Resolution of 17 September 2026—Government response—Correspondence to Federal Minister for Health and Ageing.

Secure Local Jobs Code—Independent Review—Assembly Resolution of 15 September 2026—Government response to paragraphs (3)(d)(i) and (3)(d)(ii), dated October 2026.

Water Resources Act, pursuant to subsection 67D(3)—ACT and Region Catchment Management Coordination Group—Annual report—2025-26, undated, together with a statement.

Subordinate legislation (including explanatory statements unless otherwise stated)

Legislation Act, pursuant to section 64—

Building Act—Building (Ministerial Exemptions for Regulated Swimming Pools) Guidelines 2026—Disallowable Instrument DI2026-213 (LR, 1 October 2026).

Civil Law (Wrongs) Act—Civil Law (Wrongs) (Fees) Determination 2026—Disallowable Instrument DI2026-207 (LR, 24 September 2026).

Energy Efficiency (Cost of Living) Improvement Act—

Energy Efficiency (Cost of Living) Improvement (Energy Savings Contribution) Determination 2026, including a regulatory impact statement—Disallowable Instrument DI2026-211 (LR, 29 September 2026).

Energy Efficiency (Cost of Living) Improvement (Energy Savings Target) Determination 2026, including a regulatory impact statement—Disallowable Instrument DI2026-208 (LR, 29 September 2026).

Energy Efficiency (Cost of Living) Improvement (Penalties for Noncompliance) Determination 2026, including a regulatory impact statement—Disallowable Instrument DI2026-210 (LR, 29 September 2026).

Energy Efficiency (Cost of Living) Improvement (Priority Household Target) Determination 2026, including a regulatory impact statement—Disallowable Instrument DI2026-209 (LR, 29 September 2026).

Gambling and Racing Control Act—Gambling and Racing Control (Code of Practice) Amendment Regulation 2026 (No 1), including a regulatory impact assessment—Subordinate Law SL2026-15 (LR, 17 September 2026).

Magistrates Court Act—Magistrates Court (Property Developers Infringement Notices) Regulation 2026—Subordinate Law SL2026-16 (LR, 30 September 2026).

Motor Accident Injuries Act—Motor Accident Injuries (Premiums) Guidelines 2026 (No 1)—Disallowable Instrument DI2026-204 (LR, 21 September 2026).

Official Visitor Act—Official Visitor (Chair) Appointment 2026—Disallowable Instrument DI2026-206 (LR, 21 September 2026).

Professional Engineers Act—Professional Engineers (Qualifications, Experience and Competencies) Determination 2026—Disallowable Instrument DI2026-212 (LR, 1 October 2026).

Road Transport (General) Act—Road Transport (General) Application of Road Transport Legislation (Deciding Applications for Registration – Wheelchair-Accessible Taxis) Declaration 2026—Disallowable Instrument DI2026-205 (LR, 18 September 2026).

Justice—sentencing

MR SPEAKER: Before we move to private members' business, before the debate on the motion begins, I think it is prudent to remind members of our responsibilities in this area. The Assembly's approach to sub judice principles is set out in Continuing Resolution 10, and this motion does not, in my opinion, offend against those principles. It is, of course, open for members to debate policies, guidelines and legislation around sentencing. However, I encourage members to ensure that, during the debate, members avoid criticism of any individual judges or decisions, impute improper motive or undermine the independence or importance of the courts.

MS BARRY (Ginninderra) (3.15): I move:

That this Assembly:

(1) notes that:

- (a) the sentence delivered in *DPP v Hancock (a pseudonym)* [2026] ACTSC 389 did not meet community expectations by considering that the young offender's prior lack of sexual experience and inevitably limited insight into societal norms in Australia given his very short time in the country prior to the offending are factors mitigating his moral culpability;
- (b) the sentence has attracted significant community concern, media scrutiny and ongoing commentary around the public interest in sentencing outcomes for serious and violent offences, and is a catalyst for a review that investigates broader concerns regarding current sentencing laws and outcomes; and

- (c) a lack of sexual experience or understanding of societal norms is not an excuse for sexual assault;
- (2) further notes that:
 - (a) while sentencing is an independent and impartial exercise of “instinctive synthesis” by judicial officers, the legislature has a responsibility to reflect community expectations in sentencing legislation and respond to current concerns;
 - (b) ACT Police statistics report 3,650 sexual assault charges over the past five years;
 - (c) the ACT Director of Public Prosecution’s (DPP) 2025-2026 annual report revealed that sexual violence prosecutions have increased by 96 percent over the past five years due to sustained growth in demand;
 - (d) in 2024, the Law Reform and Sentencing Advisory Council was established to provide evidence-based and systemic analyses of sentencing, including by considering community expectations; and
 - (e) in 2025, the Attorney-General abolished the Law Reform and Sentencing Advisory Council; and
- (3) calls on the Attorney-General to:
 - (a) introduce legislation to allow the Attorney-General to instruct the DPP to appeal a decision if it is considered manifestly inadequate and contrary to public expectations;
 - (b) in consultation with relevant stakeholders, commission a formal, independent and systematic review of ACT sentencing law to examine:
 - (i) sentencing purposes;
 - (ii) sentencing options;
 - (iii) statutory penalties for serious crime;
 - (iv) forms of imprisonment and attached conditions;
 - (v) non-parole periods and the decision-making function and transparency of the ACT Sentence Administration Board;
 - (vi) mitigating and aggravating factors;
 - (vii) rehabilitation facilities;
 - (viii) community safety measures, including any mandatory use of electronic monitoring devices for community-based sentences; and
 - (ix) the re-establishment of an independent and representative ACT Sentencing Council to advise the Attorney-General on sentencing matters and monitor trends and community expectations;
 - (c) examine in that review whether sentencing outcomes for serious offences are achieving the intent of sentencing legislation, including the *Crimes (Sentencing) Act 2005* and the *Crimes Act 1900*, the youth justice framework, the Government’s stated criminal justice policy objectives and community expectations; and
 - (d) table the findings and recommendations in the Assembly, together with the Government’s response and proposed reforms, within 12 months.

There are moments in our career and in our lives where we put aside politics, we put aside sentiments and we put aside political ideology and we think and reflect on whether we are actually serving the people who elected us to be here; where we ask ourselves, “Are we listening to the people who are talking to us about issues they are concerned about?” The significance of the community concerns that have been expressed both directly to members in this place and through the media in the past couple of weeks cannot be ignored. What this motion is seeking to do is to signal a clear response to Canberrans that we are not oblivious to their concerns.

Canberrans are telling us that their confidence in our criminal justice system and justice system as a whole has been shaken. They are asking whether the system is delivering justice, whether victims are being heard and whether the balance between the rights of the offender and the safety of the community is right. The community has been very clear in the recent decision and has said that that decision does not pass the pub test and does not meet their expectation. That is the bottom line. It does not reflect the seriousness with which the community views rape. The reasoning used to reduce moral culpability should never have been available as a mitigating factor. In fact, I do not even think or believe that parliament ever intended those reasons to be considered mitigating factors. As a migrant, I have heard so much from multicultural organisations and leaders that have indicated to me that that was quite concerning, especially in the political climate we are in, where migration and multiculturalism is such a hot topic. I do not feel that there is any culture where those matters raised would ever be contemplated as mitigating factors or reasons given would ever be contemplated as an excuse to engage in rape. Regardless, it is our duty as legislators to make it clear that if any offender is under that illusion, it will not be a factor that reduces their moral culpability in the ACT.

This motion is not about one case—it is not. I sat down with the wording for hours and days to ensure that I make it about what it is about and what it is not about. This case is simply a catalyst for a major review into sentencing, and we must listen. This motion is also not about criticising a judge or playing politics, as I have indicated. In fact, as I have indicated, if you read the wording of the motion, it is carefully drafted to reflect what it is and what it is not. But, for the abundance of caution, let me clarify. At its core, it provides a pathway to rebuild Canberrans’ trust and confidence in our justice system, a system that begins well before a person appears in court and continues well after sentencing until they no longer reoffend.

This motion calls for very practical measures to see parts of that call actualised. First, the motion seems to provide a power many people already believe exists in the ACT. This power exists in other jurisdictions: a basic power for the Attorney-General to appeal in their own name where it is in the public interest to do so; when a sentence is manifestly inadequate and against public expectation. As I have indicated, this power exists in New South Wales under section 5D of the Criminal Appeals Act and section 115 of the Crimes (Appeal and Review) Act. In Queensland, it is section 669A of the Criminal Code. It is not an unusual power. It does not undermine the independence of the DPP. In fact, Attorneys-General in these jurisdictions have taken matters such as those all the way to the High Court, and the High Court has never questioned the Attorney-General’s standing to bring those matters on in their own name. It is an orthodox power of a first law officer.

We all agree that the independence of the DPP is crucial. That is why this distinction matters. The Attorney-General does not direct the DPP to appeal a case under the director's name; the Attorney-General becomes the appellant in their own name acting for the community. To be clear: for the ACT, we have the opportunity to clearly define those powers in the legislation and in exceptional cases in which an Attorney-General may lodge an appeal, where a sentence is manifestly inadequate and when it is in the interest or the best interest of the public. For the abundance of caution again: the DPP, while independent, is not the judiciary, and this motion does not take away their independence. Rather, it gives the Attorney-General, as an elected member, an opportunity to respond proactively to public concerns in cases where it is necessary and expected that the Attorney-General would.

The motion also calls for a comprehensive and rigorous review of the disposition of sentencing laws and the sentencing framework in general. As legislators, we first and foremost have an obligation to our community. We swore an oath to serve and represent our constituents. I would be failing in my responsibilities by shying away from this issue. I acknowledge that sentencing is extremely complicated and complex. I get that. If anyone in this place gets it, I do, because I have engaged with it. It is not a tick-box exercise. It is not even a mathematical assessment. In fact, that is why we pay judicial officers so handsomely to find a balance that reflects the seriousness of the offence, gives victims a sense of justice and provides an avenue for an offender's rehabilitation. I recognise that, and I understand that there are some areas where we must keep our hands to ourselves. However, we must also recognise that the law has never worked when you set and forget. The public have a right to express their views and concerns on this matter. Sentencing decisions are not beyond criticism and we have no right to muzzle the community.

Importantly, this motion does not at all undermine the independence, impartiality and institutional integrity of our judiciary. It does not touch the judiciary at all. It simply seeks to review the statutory framework, which is the clear signal of our legislative intent and which we must ask that the courts refer to when sentencing. It is not unexpected that these things should be reviewed over time. This is how we reflect public expectations and how we preserve trust and confidence in our institutions. This is why the public must be involved in the process, to ensure that the conversation around sentencing laws achieves proper public scrutiny.

Indeed, the review is squarely focused on what the legislature has a responsibility to do and what practical measures it can take to reassure the public and to reinforce confidence in our institution. It would include continuing sentencing options and the suitability of different options for crimes. It would compare the ACT penalties to other jurisdictions to develop a best practice basis for sentencing in Australia. It would investigate the chronic risk factors that are contextually relevant to Canberra and create recommendations based on this. It would consider the section 7 "purpose of sentencing" in relation to particular crimes and age groups, including how they are achieved and what community expects of them. It would review whether specific provisions should be made or what factors may be considered mitigating or aggravating in relation to particular crimes. It would look at whether the community expects a mandatory minimum sentence for some serious offences and whether a particular method of calculating non-parole periods based on the head sentence to serious offences is needed. It would look at the transparency, function and risk management framework used by

the Sentence Administration Board and whether changes need to be made to better balance the rights of the community, expectations of community, rights of victims and also the rights of offenders. It would review the utility of suitability of rehabilitation facilities in Canberra for rehabilitating the many diverse people who experience the justice system. It would consider practical measures to improve community safety when an offender is serving a sentence in the community, like electronic monitoring devices—a promise which this government has just outrightly abandoned.

The uncomfortable truth is that these decisions and policies of this government in the context of sentencing must be scrutinised. The success or failure should be measured against both their own policies and the realities of sentencing in Canberra. That includes the decision by the Attorney-General to disband the ACT Law Reform and Sentencing Advisory Council, which would no doubt have been a useful starting point in advising on some of these issues that have recently gained attention and in monitoring community sentiments.

One of the things that this motion points out is that, despite the former Attorney-General only giving the Law Reform and Sentencing Council its first assignment in 2024, the review and advice on sentencing and recidivism in relation to dangerous driving, the current Attorney-General disbanded that panel in 2025 for no apparent reason and did not replace it with anything. So now she receives absolutely no independent advice on sentencing matters. Having a robust representative and properly independent advisory council for such a complex and contentious body of law is highly critical and it has become a standard across Australia. Almost every other jurisdiction in the country has a sentencing advisory council. The government can continue to spend recklessly in so many areas, but they continually tell victims and the community that they put a price on their safety. To me, that is offensive. It is exactly what the government found recently when it abandoned its promise to introduce an electronic monitoring system. We are fundamentally out of step with other jurisdictions on this.

The current approach is not working in the ACT. As long as the underlying and adjacent issues across the system remain unaddressed, we will not see the rates of recidivism and incarceration in any meaningful way reduced. The best way we can get to the bottom of this issue and identify what aspect of the sentencing framework really needs reform is by commissioning a comprehensive, independent and formal review into the sentencing framework as a whole. A review alone is not enough—and I admit that—but it is a good start and a solid basis for reform. The community must be invited to the conversation. But, more importantly, the review must lead to action and its findings and recommendations should be a result of expert research and must be implemented. I commend the motion to the Assembly.

MR PARTON (Brindabella—Leader of the Opposition) (3.29): Right at the top of our priorities as members of this parliament, whether we be non-executive members or executive members, is to represent the people of the communities—to represent the people who voted for us and the people who did not vote for us. That is at the core.

This motion revolves as much as anything else around a failure to meet community expectations. I know there are probably some who would suggest quietly that we are scaremongering, and we are not—we are simply not. As my contribution to this debate, I want to reflect on that community sentiment and the failure to meet those expectations

by sharing with the chamber some of the comments that have come through on social media about events that led to this motion and about this motion itself. Elizabeth said:

A lot of the text in the Human Rights legislation is about the rights of criminals, not much for the rights of victims.

Michael said:

The ACT government's decision to abandon a commitment to adopt ankle bracelets to track violent offenders and DV perpetrators demonstrates where it places community safety in the priority list.

Stewie said:

It seems that people who break the law and don't contribute to society are laughing all the way to the courts.

Trev said:

The rate of recidivist crime is off the scale. Some have been fined thousands of dollars and given bail only to cop another fine and bail again. The fines remain unpaid, and they keep accumulating.

Travis said in regards to this motion:

These proposals are eminently sensible. It would be good if all MLAs sent a strong message that convicted perpetrators of sexual and violent crimes will be sanctioned appropriately for the serious and sometimes life-long harm that they cause to their victims and their victims' families and unanimously support this motion.

Reece said:

The justice system here has become so infested with leftists—

Reece was getting a bit carried away, but this is what he said; this is his view—

that they are now more concerned with protecting criminals' rights rather than protecting victims or their right to justice.

Michael said:

Canberra is getting to be known as the city where criminals have human rights, but not their victims.

Hamish—not this Hamish—said:

There is a need to put victims' rights ahead of perpetrators. The scales aren't balanced at this point, and age shouldn't matter in comparison to the seriousness of some of these crimes.

Brett said:

Police must be so frustrated. This is a ridiculous situation.

I would refer members to the recent editorials from Alex Caruana from the AFPA. Bethany said:

If you look on ACT Policing's page, they posted a ridiculously worrying amount of crimes that they had to do jobs for and how the courts just let everyone walk free.

These are the community's sentiments. Cindy said:

Where do the lawmakers live? They must live in a gated community where they don't have to worry about crime.

Karen said:

I'm sick of reading about criminals in general being given bail and then reoffending while on bail.

It is abundantly clear that the outcomes that we are seeing are falling a mile short of community expectations. I applaud the work of Chiaka Barry in bringing this motion forward, and in doing whatever we can from this side of the chamber to fix what is a system that is not delivering outcomes acceptable to the community. I commend the motion.

MS CASTLEY (Yerrabi) (3.34): I have spent a lot of time doorknocking in my community lately, and I have to say that crime is one of the most common concerns being raised with me. Despite the government's reassurances, there is a growing perception that crime is a growing problem, both in Yerrabi and around the territory.

Just in the last few weeks, we have heard about a number of things—livestock being killed, and Liquorland in Amaroo being done over so many times that I have lost count. I read an article about it earlier in the *Canberra Times*, and it is happening all too often. People hear these stories and they do worry. They hear that crime is occurring, that our police are under-resourced, that our prosecutors are under-resourced, and they worry for their families and their communities. They particularly worry when they hear that a crime has been committed, the police and prosecutors have done their jobs, and the offender has been found guilty and been given a sentence they see as manifestly inadequate.

Those concerns have been loud and clear following the decision that has been put on the record this afternoon. A significant number of people are outraged at the idea that a person can be found guilty of a violent rape and still be allowed to walk free. I share their outrage, and the view that our sentencing laws need to be reformed.

I was prepared to welcome this motion. I hoped we would debate the flaws in our sentencing laws and how they need to change; but, honestly, I was underwhelmed when I saw the motion and realised that the intention was just to re-litigate that a problem exists within our sentencing. We already know that. Almost all of us accept that there is a case for change, which means it is time to focus on the solution.

In my view, the fundamental problem with our sentencing laws is that our focus is on offenders. When we establish that our priorities are to rehabilitate offenders, to avoid custodial sentences whenever possible, and to give serious weight to their cultural and economic backgrounds, we are putting the rights and privileges of offenders first. The intended outcome of this is exactly what we have seen in the Hancock case—that a shockingly lenient sentence was suspended. At no point in the process does anyone consider the incentives that lenient sentences create for other people in the community. For prospective offenders, a sentence like this is a clear message that you can act in an entirely selfish way and that the consequence will be minimal: you will not be imprisoned; you will not be prevented from doing this again; and you will not even be named. There is absolutely no deterrent value.

The whole point of a criminal justice system is to recognise that some people in society will want to do things that benefit themselves at the expense of others. There may be circumstances where behavioural therapy or other programs can deter potential or actual offenders but, for most prospective offenders, the thing that will stop them committing an offence is the knowledge that they will be found, they will be prosecuted and they will be punished. What stops them is their own realisation that the act is not worth it, which means that lenient sentences are completely counterproductive.

The other incentive effect of lenient sentences is on the victims. As we all know, part of the reason these offences persist is because they are not being reported, are not being investigated and are not being prosecuted. The government talks a big game about protecting and supporting those who have suffered through these offences, and the need to change our systems and institutions so that people feel safe when making reports and going through the justice process. But why would anyone who has experienced an offence—an assault, a rape or worse—go through the ordeal of a police report, an investigation and a prosecution, knowing that the offender can be found guilty and still walk free? Surely, a person only does this because they are seeking justice for the wrong they have suffered. To go through all of that and hear that a guilty offender has been given a suspended sentence must feel like the opposite of justice, and I suspect someone in that situation may regret ever having made a complaint.

If we want prospective offenders to think twice before committing offences, and if we want future victims of crime to report offences, we need to totally reshape the incentives that we have created through our sentencing laws. I am sure there are some who will radically oppose this—those who believe that crime is the result of cultural and economic factors which are largely beyond an individual's control, who believe that diversionary programs and behavioural therapy are the way to deal with offenders, and that more police means more crime.

Those views are influential, especially within the ACT government, but they are wrong—not just wrong because the system they have created is wildly out of step with the views of our community, but because they are creating a society which is less safe and less pleasant. They are doing the wrong thing by victims, both actual and prospective, and they are even doing the wrong thing by offenders, who are infantilised when their actions are excused, instead of being made to take responsibility for their actions.

Until people accept that this ideology that has infected our understanding of criminal justice has failed, we are never going to escape situations like this. It will happen again, and I am absolutely furious about what has happened. Anyone who puts themselves into the shoes of that young woman, who had her choice taken from her—she had her bodily autonomy violated; she must have felt terror unlike anything she had felt in her life—and who did all the right things—reporting the crime, telling her story, standing up in court—only to see the offender set free, must feel that same fury. I would imagine they would feel a burning anger, not only at the offender but at the entire criminal justice system which has failed this young woman.

How can anyone see an outcome like this and have any pride in the ACT's criminal justice system? How can they believe that they are getting it right or delivering justice? I hope and I expect that the government really reflects on how we got here and what really needs to change. The decisions and the reforms that you make will be your individual legacy on criminal justice. Choose wisely.

MS VASSAROTTI (Kurrajong) (3.41): Thank you, Ms Barry, for bringing this matter to the Assembly today. I will start by emphasising that I will be somewhat circumspect in my remarks, noting that the Supreme Court matter that is referenced in the motion is not necessarily concluded. As I understand it, the DPP have 28 days to file an appeal of a sentence, if they choose to do so, and that time has not yet elapsed. In fact, the DPP have stated that they are currently considering whether or not to appeal the particular matter.

In the interest of not politicising or interfering with the standard judicial process, I will avoid detailed commentary. The sub judice rule, of course, also applies in the Assembly for this reason. It may be, for example, that, through standard legal processes, the sentence in this case is appealed in the future and that that appeal may even be successful. The process has not yet run its course.

I am happy to talk about the broader policy issues that are relevant to this motion. I will start at the very beginning, by reaffirming the view of the Greens that sexual violence and violence against women is a horrific problem in the ACT and Australia. It is absolutely unacceptable that these crimes occur at all, let alone to the extent that they do. There have been ongoing failures at many levels to mitigate this issue, and sexual violence remains a shameful problem that continues to impact on the lives of so many people. That includes victim-survivors and their families, as well as the general public, whose behaviour, choices and sense of safety are constrained by the risk of sexual violence.

Ms Barry cited some statistics of sexual assault matters in her motion, noting that the number of prosecutions has increased. I would add to that the fact that these matters, the matters that are prosecuted, are only the tip of the iceberg. For example, the ABS Personal Safety Survey has reported that only 7.7 per cent of women who experienced sexual assault by a male in the previous 10 years contacted police about their most recent incident. Recorded police statistics substantially underestimate the true prevalence of sexual assault. It is one of the most under-reported crimes in Australia.

There are many reasons for coming forward. Some of these reasons relate to the justice system. The *Listen. Take Action to Prevent, Believe and Heal* report highlighted the

concerns about victims' experiences of reporting and navigating the criminal justice process. Similarly, the Sexual Assault (Police) Review report examined why so many reported sexual assault matters did not progress. It made recommendations to improve victim-survivors' experience of the criminal justice system and strengthen confidence in reporting. Both of these reports are still being implemented, with some measures, I think, being addressed too slowly.

The broader context is important because, when it comes to sexual assault, the response of the justice system is only one of many relevant issues. What we need is a concerted, collective, national effort to address the drivers of this kind of violence. Individuals, families, communities, organisations and systems, including the legal system, all play an important role. The sentencing of an offender is at the end of the pipeline. We need to take more action in the preventive space. We need to change the societal norms that condone, excuse or downplay violence against women. We also need more work on early intervention—that is, secondary prevention.

When looking at the issues of sentencing, there is a lot to talk about in this space. Returning to the specifics of the motion, I will make a few comments on the issues of sentencing. Sentencing is one of the most challenging tasks that our courts undertake. Judges are expected to balance the range of objectives in sentencing, which include punishment, deterrence, rehabilitation, accountability and the protection of the community. Sentencing is also one of the issues that is most discussed in public. It is regularly the case that the public are often dissatisfied with sentencing outcomes.

As many judges and sentencing experts have observed over many years, the public often sees only a fraction of the information that is before a court when a sentence is imposed. Sentencing advisory bodies, such as the Victorian Sentencing Advisory Council or the New South Wales Judicial Commission, have regularly looked into these issues and repeatedly found that public confidence in sentencing will increase when people are provided with fuller information about a case and the reasons for the sentence.

It is often the case that people initially regard a sentence as too lenient, but views often change when they learn more details about a case. This includes information such as an offender's circumstances, the applicable sentencing principles and the full sentencing remarks. A brief media report on a sentence, for example, will rarely be able to provide the full context of criminal matters, which are often quite complex.

Hearing that there is no jail time for a serious crime can also be confronting, but it is important to note that community-based sentences are not consequence free. Again, without commenting on any particular case, there are a range of obligations that community sentences can involve, including things like reporting and complying with directions of a community corrections officer, performing community service work or attending restorative justice conferences.

Another factor that is worth emphasising in any discussion about sentencing is that, where appropriate, a rehabilitative approach to a crime can result in better outcomes for the community, because incarceration is recognised as a criminogenic factor—that is, a factor that makes it more likely that someone will offend more in the future. This can seem counterintuitive, because incarceration is supposed to be a deterrent. But evidence does show that incarceration can result in worse outcomes for the community.

Community-based sentences and rehabilitative initiatives can make the community safer for everyone.

There is, of course, a role for the Assembly in enacting sentencing laws that can give broad guidance to the courts. It is also prudent to review and amend these laws in an evidence-based fashion. The Victims of Crime Commissioner has recently raised issues about the potential inconsistency of some sentences in the ACT compared to other jurisdictions, and this is an issue that it would be prudent to look at.

As I will discuss shortly, we will be supporting the broad intent of Ms Barry's motion to review the ACT's sentencing laws, but in an amended fashion, to ensure that the review is targeted and effective.

On this note, I would also like to emphasise paragraphs (2)(d) and (2)(e) of Ms Barry's motion, which note that the Law Reform and Sentencing Council was enacted in the last term of government, but then abolished by this government in 2025. The Law Reform and Sentencing Council was supported by the Greens. It was established to deal with exactly the kind of issue that we are debating today, but to deal with such issues in a sensible, long-term, evidence-based way. As the previous Attorney-General said, when establishing that council:

This new, independent Council will undertake a critical advisory function on law reform and sentencing issues. Instead of a once-off review, this Council will be a lasting mechanism that will be both proactive and reactive in considering sentencing issues. The Council will undertake community and stakeholder consultation, and conduct and publish research, in order to make recommendations on law reform and sentencing issues referred to it. In the past months, we have seen calls within the community for changes to sentencing. This Council will operate independently, to address issues as they arrive in a considered and consultative fashion.

What a shame that we do not have that now. The Greens did not and do not support the abolishment of the council by the Labor government in 2025. We now find ourselves again in a situation where we are having to establish an ad hoc review in response to individual sentencing matters. We could instead have taken advantage of the advice and expertise of the sentencing council.

I want also specifically to comment on paragraph (3)(a) of Ms Barry's motion, which calls on the government to introduce legislation that would allow the Attorney-General to work with the DPP to appeal a decision if it is considered manifestly inadequate or contrary to public expectations. I think there are some significant issues with this proposal, and that it will not address the concerns that we are talking about today.

It is a significant change to the ACT system, which highly values the independence of the DPP. It is a strength of our system. The DPP is given that independence for a good reason; it is to prevent the prosecutorial process from being politicised and to keep decisions about prosecutions and appeals in the hands of an independent and expert body. These prosecutorial decisions should be based on all the evidence, the law and the public interest, not political pressure, media attention or the views of a particular government of the day. The independence of the DPP is to ensure that these decisions are made consistently and impartially.

I do not really see why the Attorney-General can determine any better than the DPP what is considered manifestly inadequate or contrary to public expectation. It is likely that this would differ, depending on the political persuasion of the Attorney-General. Crime and sentencing issues are already debated a lot in this chamber, and political parties regularly disagree. Entrusting these decisions to an independent statutory office rather than a politician is an important safeguard, and part of the broader separation of powers.

I recognise the distinction that Ms Barry has made around the way that this legislation might work, but for me it does start to introduce a perception of the erosion of independence. In any case, it is not clear to me that there is any issue with the DPP that needs addressing. The DPP can, and already does, choose to appeal decisions where they are considered inadequate. I understand that the DPP has, in fact, appealed five sentences in the last two years. The proposal seems like a reach to find some kind of strong legislative response, but it does not address the right issue.

I have also recently reached out to a range of legal and justice stakeholders in the ACT to discuss these issues. In their response, they have emphasised the importance of independence in our justice system.

Lastly, I note that the Greens will be supporting the amendments from the government. The amendments agree to conduct a sentencing review, but they ensure that it is targeted to the issues that have recently been raised, rather than having a broad-brush, generalised review. I think this will be more effective. The review will still cover key issues raised in Ms Barry's original motion, including the Law Reform and Sentencing Council and, importantly, electronic monitoring. I note that we will discuss electronic monitoring in a motion later this week.

MRS MORRIS (Brindabella) (3.54): I rise to speak in support of Ms Barry's motion. I thank her for bringing it forward to the Assembly today in the very careful and intentional way that she has, because this is an issue that has ignited anger, distress, hurt and a profound sense of injustice right across our community. We have to be able to answer a very difficult question in this Assembly today. The question that must be answered is: how can a convicted rapist walk out of court without serving a single day of his sentence in jail?

The victim in the court proceeding details the shame that she felt, her loss of dignity and confidence, and her sense of self because of the assault. She said she could no longer call her body her own, that her life was stolen from her, and that she will forever be changed. I recount that experience in this place so that we remember and understand the gravity of crime and the impact that it can have on people's lives—people in our community; people who are looking to us to ensure that the legislative framework is right. This young woman now confronts a lifetime of trauma and healing while a convicted offender is in the community without having served a single day of his sentence in jail. This is why the community is so concerned that the justice system seems to be more concerned about the so-called rights and rehabilitation of offenders and criminals rather than the rights of victims, and rather than justice and the welfare of a young woman whose life has been tipped upside down.

People are understandably upset. Whether our legal system provided no alternative to this sentencing outcome or whether it was the outcome of judicial discretion, we in this place must have the courage to scrutinise it, call it out and make any necessary legislative changes, because, if a sentence fails to reflect the severity of the crime, the legal system loses its moral authority and public confidence is undermined at a time when we can least afford it.

We must be alert to the dangerous message that inadequate sentences risk sending to the community. The risk of a manifestly inadequate sentence is that it tells victims that their trauma and suffering are secondary and that the legal system protects the convenience, the future prospects and the human rights of offenders over justice and the rights that should be owed to victims. It risks telling victims that, if they do the right thing and come forward, they may not be protected for that. Coming forward is a gruelling process. It is a gruelling process of police interviews, court appearances and reliving the worst trauma of your life only to find that a guilty verdict may see the offender walk free in the community, and this will almost certainly add to the trauma and suffering of the victim.

An inadequate sentence also risks sending a dangerous message to potential and repeat offenders because it suggests that violent crime carries no significant or meaningful consequence. Canberra has previously been described by criminals involved in organised crime as a place to come to engage in their crime because there is zero accountability from the ACT government. They have said this is a place to come to do unlawful activities and that they can do so under the nose of this government without consequence. When we see this manifestly inadequate sentencing, it is hard not to agree with that.

As Director of the National Security Program at the Australian Strategic Policy Institute, Dr John Coyne wrote in the *Canberra Times* on this issue. He said, “The scales of justice in Canberra have swung too far in favour of the offender.” I believe Dr Coyne is right; he is spot-on. We, on this side of the chamber, have long argued that the rights of offenders too often outweigh the rights of victims. This sentencing outcome has brought that widely-felt community sentiment into focus.

We cannot sit silently in this chamber while people’s trust in our legal system further erodes, because the most fundamental role of government is to protect people from crime and keep our community safe. To do so, we need a criminal justice system that works. We must protect victims and we must hold offenders accountable for their crimes. So I thank Ms Barry for bringing this motion forward, and I commend it to the Assembly.

MS CHEYNE (Ginninderra—Manager of Government Business, Attorney-General, Minister for City and Government Services, and Minister for Transport) (4.01), by leave: I move the following amendments together:

1. Omit all text in paragraphs (1)(a) and (b), substitute:
“(a) sexual violence is unacceptable, and ACT laws apply equally to everyone;”.
2. In paragraph (1)(c), omit “assault”, substitute: “violence”.

3. After all text in paragraph (1)(c), insert new paragraphs:
 - “(c) sentencing outcomes for serious sexual violence offending can attract media scrutiny and strong community concern; and
 - (d) while a single sentencing judgement does not establish a system-wide pattern, it may be timely to review current sentencing laws and outcomes for serious sexual violence offending;”.
4. In paragraph (2)(d), after “Council was established”, insert: “, in part,”.
5. Omit all text in paragraph (3), substitute:

“(3) calls on the Attorney-General to affirm:

 - (a) the importance of prosecutorial independence; and
 - (b) that prosecutorial independence does not remove the need to examine credible evidence of any deficiencies in the sentencing framework;”.
6. Add:

“(4) calls on the Government to:

 - (a) in consultation with relevant stakeholders, undertake a targeted review of the *Crimes (Sentencing) Act 2005* as it applies to serious sexual violence offences since the 2021 Report: *Listen. Take Action to Prevent, Believe and Heal*, including an examination of:
 - (i) suspended sentences, the treatment of mitigating factors, and the young-offender provisions;
 - (ii) community safety measures, including use of electronic monitoring devices for community-based sentences; and
 - (iii) the re-establishment of an independent and representative ACT Sentencing Council to advise the Attorney-General on sentencing matters and monitor trends and community expectations; and
 - (b) table the findings and recommendations in the Legislative Assembly, together with the ACT Government’s response and proposed reforms, within 12 months”.

In discussing the broader questions that this case raises, it is important that—as I think Mrs Morris has done quite well just now—we do not lose sight of the person most directly affected. Before I go further, I too wish to acknowledge the young woman at the centre of the matter that is being described as a catalyst. She was raped, she reported what happened, she gave evidence, and there was a conviction. Nothing I say about the sentence, the legal process or the responsibilities of those involved should be taken as diminishing the seriousness of what happened to her or the impact it has had on her life, her family, her loved ones, her friends and her future.

Also, I accept that people are entitled to expect that our sentencing laws reflect the seriousness of sexual violence, the harm it causes and the need to keep our community safe. Our laws apply equally to everyone. A lack of sexual experience or a lack of familiarity with Australian societal norms are not excuses for sexual violence. Consent is not optional. It does not depend on someone’s background, their experience or how long they have lived in the country. But there is a distinction between the law that applies to everyone and the factors that a court is permitted to weigh when it sentences. With that question in mind, it is entirely legitimate to ask whether our sentencing laws

get that balance right, particularly for serious sexual offences, and that is a question that the government and this Assembly can, and should, examine.

There were some contributions in Ms Barry's debate about what this motion is and is not about. I do not want to labour this point, and I have thought several times in the last half an hour about whether to do so or not, but I do need to draw attention to it because it colours what I say next and what this debate is about—namely, I refer to Ms Barry's debate points that the motion is seeking for the Attorney-General to have the power to appeal a sentence in their own name where it is in the public interest to do so, when it is manifestly inadequate and against public expectation; to be an appellant in their own name. She went on to state that the High Court has not questioned an Attorney-General bringing matters on in their own name, and also that the DPP's independence is crucial, and that is why the distinction matters. I do not disagree with any of that, but what Ms Barry has stated in her speech is a different proposition to what is in front of us.

The motion states at (3)(a) that the call-on is to “introduce legislation to allow the Attorney-General to instruct the DPP to appeal a decision if it is considered manifestly inadequate and contrary to public expectations”. Perhaps that is an error or perhaps the wrong version of the motion was submitted—it happens to us all—but we are responding to the motion in front of us, and the motion in front of us is about the A-G instructing the DPP. My following comments are going to reflect on that, but I do not want it to be confused with the entirely different proposition that was put in Ms Barry's speech. I say that so that everyone can follow along when they read this later.

On (3)(a) in front of us, I think most people in this place agree that there is a line between accountability and interference. The motion, as drafted with (3)(a), asks me to cross it by calling on me to introduce legislation allowing an A-G to instruct the Director of Public Prosecutions to appeal a sentence. I will not do that, not because I am indifferent to the outcome; it is quite the opposite. Our justice system must be independent of political pressure. Decisions of the DPP regarding whether to appeal need to be made on the evidence and the law, not the politics of the day. Victim-survivors deserve to know that decisions about their cases are made independently, fairly and without political interference. That independence is particularly important when emotions are understandably running high and the pressure to act is greatest.

That is one of the reasons behind asking this Assembly to declare that the sentence in a named case did not meet community expectations, and I understand why, but I am not prepared to have this chamber pronounce on a sentence while the DPP is still deciding whether to appeal it. If the DPP appeals, then the court will decide whether the sentence was wrong, with the full record of it. The resolution of this Assembly with the form of words currently in (1) pre-empts that or is irrelevant to it. I think neither is useful. The amendment that I have put forward to (1) is not intended to dilute Ms Barry's points; it is to provide factual statements that will remain true no matter what.

I also accept that prosecutorial independence does not mean government can wash its hands of responsibility. The director is responsible for individual prosecutions. We are responsible for the laws under which people are sentenced. So my amendment further asks the Assembly to affirm both of those things together because they belong together. They do not intersect; they sit parallel.

Regarding the Law Reform and Sentencing Advisory Council, I made the decision to discontinue it, and I stand by it. I want to be, and I will be, judged on outcomes, not on how many advisory bodies I fund. I appreciate, and I agree, that is what the record shows—that Mr Rattenbury said that the council was intended to be ongoing—but the reality is that, no matter what he said, the intent was that there was no ongoing funding source for it. And it was announced in late 2022, four years ago, but it did not begin and did not even have a membership until late 2023, and, at that time, the then A-G announced that two areas of reform would be referred to the council—not one but two.

After 18 months, it had completed one review. This is not a reflection on the council's leadership or its expertise, nor the value of the work it produced. But its disbandment did not slow us down on law reform, because the other area of reform that it had been tasked with was in relation to bail. In fact, by May last year I released a discussion paper on bail, and I introduced significant reforms earlier this year, all in the time it realistically would have taken for a review to be completed. Nevertheless, I am prepared to reconsider the utility of the council as part of this review.

Regarding the review, the motion, as drafted, calls for a formal systematic and broad-ranging review of sentencing law, and to give us a year. It would take so much longer than a year, and, honestly, I think it would tell us very little about the question in front of us and the question that has enlivened so much commentary in the community.

My amendments commit the government to a targeted review of the Crimes Sentencing Act as it applies to serious sexual violence, looking at outcomes since the landmark 2021 report *Listen. Take action to prevent, believe and heal*. That report was this territory's reckoning with how sexual violence is prosecuted and how victim-survivors are treated. It is the right starting line for this review. It is proposed that this review will examine how suspended sentences, mitigating factors and the young offender provisions operate in these cases. It is the young offender provisions in particular which I feel have been somewhat lost in the public discourse—the provisions which require a court to treat imprisonment of a young person as a last resort and for the shortest appropriate term. Those laws, those provisions, date from 2008, and so, almost 20 years later, there is a question of whether, for the most serious sexual offending, that remains the right instruction.

The review will also examine community safety measures for people serving sentences in the community, and the review will involve the people who understand these issues firsthand: victim-survivors and the services that support them, the Victims of Crime Commissioner, the Director of Public Prosecutions, the courts, the police and the legal profession.

I want to finish solemnly by speaking to the victim-survivors who have followed this case and the many people who have contacted me and other members of this Assembly, and those who have signed petitions calling for change. I hear you and this government hears you. I understand why this sentence has caused distress, anger or disbelief. I do not want anyone who has experienced sexual violence to conclude from this debate or the debate that is being had in the community that coming forward is pointless or that what happened to them will not be taken seriously. Through you, Mr Deputy Speaker:

you deserve to be heard, you deserve to be treated with dignity, and you deserve a justice system worthy of your trust.

I cannot change what happened to this young woman, and it is not for politicians to decide whether a sentence should be appealed, but we can and we will examine whether our laws are working as they should, identify where they need to change, and take responsibility for changing them, with the voices of victim-survivors in the room. That is what these amendments do, and I commend them to the Assembly.

MR EMERSON (Kurrajong) (4.14): I will start by thanking Ms Barry for bringing this motion to the Assembly today. I will not speak to the detail of recent cases but I, like many people in our community, have been disturbed to read of some of the mitigating factors that have been taken into account in sexual assault cases in our jurisdiction, which many Canberrans clearly believe fall well short of community expectations and risk doing a serious injustice to victim-survivors of sexual violence, which of course include the young woman whose devastating experience led to this motion today and whose trauma is now playing out very publicly in a way she has no control over.

I am not here to criticise judges, who of course are required to interpret and apply the law before them, nor to interfere with any legal processes that are underway or any decisions yet to be made by the Director of Public Prosecutions. We already know of many sexual assault cases that have attracted sentences leading to significant public concern and that court processes are known to be particularly unjust and devastating processes for victim-survivors. These dynamics influence how few sexual violence victim-survivors report to police, as Ms Vassarotti reflected on. The matter raised by Ms Barry, and rightly raised, has caused us here, the legislature of the ACT, to pause and consider whether the laws that judges are compelled to apply are fit for purpose or whether they are due for a review. Again, with that in mind, I thank Ms Barry for bringing this motion to the Assembly, although I do wonder if the timing could have been different and whether this may have been more effectively considered once this particular matter that is referenced in the motion had been able to run its full course—appeal or no appeal.

I do have concerns with one particular element of the motion, which other members have reflected on: calling for the law to be amended, such that the Attorney-General may instruct the DPP to appeal a decision. The doctrine of the separation of powers is a fundamental tenet of our democracy and not something that should be impinged on. Now more than ever our communities are calling for greater integrity, greater transparency and greater accountability of parliaments and parliamentarians. They do not want to see parliamentarians able to interfere in judicial or prosecutorial processes which are rightly established, at least here in the ACT, with clear and uncompromised independence. We have seen what this looks like when it happens in other parts of the world. That is not something we want in this part of the world. Even if we may have faith that the current Attorney-General is a person of integrity who would not seek to interfere in these processes, she should not have that power. She herself is saying as much. This power would put our democracy at risk if we did one day find ourselves with an Attorney-General willing to politicise the judicial arm, or who had an alternative view on the separation of powers and prosecutorial independence.

Judges are responsible for making sentencing decisions, because they are best placed

to do it. They are the people qualified and employed to make those significant and impactful decisions. Our broader community is not present in the courtroom. None of us hear the evidence, all of the evidence, and do not have the qualifications and independence to apply life-defining and precedent-setting sentencing decisions. That is why this function resides with judges and why any law empowering the Attorney-General to direct prosecutors based on community sentiment is a very, very slippery slope.

With that said, community sentiment should absolutely be factored into our lawmaking. Our role here in the legislature, here in the parliament, is to represent the interest of our community when we undertake that function. We listen to our community; we consult before voting on legislation and policy; and we contribute to changes to those laws and policies. That is why I am supportive of the principle of the other part of this motion: a review of our sentencing framework to ensure it is fit for purpose and meets community expectations. I appreciate the Attorney-General's amendments, which target a review of the specific elements of our sentencing framework that have been questioned by our community recently in the wake of this case and in today's motion—that is, the use of suspended sentences, the treatment of mitigating factors and the young offender provisions.

The amendments refer to the 2021 *Listen. Take action to prevent, believe and heal* report by the Sexual Assault Prevention and Response Steering Committee. I am keen not to reinvent the wheel or unnecessarily redirect public sector resourcing, given the intention this received not so long ago, but I do think we have a good opportunity here for a targeted consideration of whether those specific elements of our sentencing framework meet community expectations. On that basis, I thank the Attorney-General for her amendments, which I will be supporting, and I again thank the shadow Attorney-General for bringing this matter before our parliament today. We have a long way to go to improve outcomes for victim-survivors of family domestic and sexual violence and to eliminate abhorrent violent crimes like rape from our community. We have so much work to do in this area, and I think there is unanimous support across the Assembly on that front. Hopefully, this amended motion brings us one step closer to that and to a safer and more just community for all Canberrans.

MS CARRICK (Murrumbidgee) (4.19): I also thank Ms Barry for bringing forward this motion. The case that has prompted this debate has caused genuine distress in our community, particularly for victim-survivors of sexual violence. Many Canberrans have read the sentencing remarks and have asked how such an outcome aligns with their understanding of justice. Those concerns should not be dismissed. Victims deserve to be heard, respected and supported—and community confidence in our justice system matters. Sexual assault is a serious crime. A lack of sexual experience, cultural misunderstanding or unfamiliarity with social norms can never excuse offending conduct. Every person in our community has the right to safety, dignity and bodily autonomy.

While parliament has a legitimate role in reviewing sentencing laws and ensuring they reflect contemporary community standards, there is an important distinction between reviewing the law and intervening in individual cases. Once governments gain the power to direct appeals in particular matters, we risk politicising prosecution decisions and weakening the separation between the executive and the courts. The answer to

community concern is not political involvement in individual prosecutions; it is transparent evidence-based review of our sentencing framework, careful consideration of whether the law is achieving its intended purposes and continued support for victims throughout the justice process.

We can acknowledge the anger and fury many people feel and support measures that strengthen public confidence and examine whether reforms are needed while also defending the independence of the judiciary and the DPP. Those principles exist to protect all Canberrans and are strongest when they are upheld in different and controversial cases. For those reasons, I support a thoughtful review of community expectations and sentencing laws, but I do not support political intervention in individual judicial decisions.

MR COCKS (Murrumbidgee) (4.22): I thank Ms Barry for bringing the motion to the Assembly today and for being so reasonable in what she has presented and what she has asked of the government—because, as Ms Barry knows on this, I am pretty sure I am going to sound kind of unreasonable, because words cannot express the anger I felt when I heard of this decision. Words are utterly insufficient to express the disappointment and anger I felt as I looked over Labor’s amendment to this motion today. Frankly, I will not accept the supposedly progressive government’s erasure of a young women’s experience of rape from this motion.

That case is the reason we are even talking about this today. I never wanted to have to give a speech like this on this subject in this place. I am not even sure how I am going to get through it. A speech like this should not be necessary, because what happened to the young woman who is the victim-survivor in this case should never have happened. Even after that happened, a sentencing decision that is this far out of step with community expectations should not have happened. I am tired of the system that puts the perpetrator ahead of the victim.

We are discussing this because a young woman was raped by a young man days away from turning 17 and then the system that should put justice for the victim of that crime first did not. The facts I am about to describe are graphic—they are not comfortable. They are important because it is important to understand the violence of the assault and rape. It is important to speak plainly and to understand the full context that someone was referring to earlier, because the victim of this crime, the person who lives with its impact, is not protected by some euphemisms. She cannot escape the reality of her experience, and we, every one of us, should have to face it in the same detail because it is unacceptable. It is inexcusable. The court records show that, at a house party, the defendant took a girl away from her friends and they began kissing. What followed was not consensual. This young man used his body to trap her. He ripped her clothes to gain access to her body.

MR DEPUTY SPEAKER: Can you please stop the time? I remind members of the statement by the Speaker provided at the start of this particular debate that “the Assembly’s approach to sub judice principles is set out in continuing resolution 10 and this motion does not, in my opinion, offend those principles”. Continuing to refer to the details of the case, however, may trip over into that. So I would advise you to proceed with caution, Mr Cocks.

MR COCKS: My understanding, Mr Deputy Speaker, is that a judgment has been made and that no appeal has been lodged.

Ms Cheyne: Mr Deputy Speaker, that is because we are in the statutory 28-day appeal period, within which it is still open to the DPP to decide whether to appeal or not. So, on the motion as drafted, I agree with the Speaker's ruling but I also agree with the advice that you are providing, Mr Deputy Speaker, that this is really cutting it fine.

MR DEPUTY SPEAKER: I will give you an opportunity to respond before I proceed, Mr Cocks, if you wish.

MR COCKS: I am afraid I do not have the advantage of having the continuing resolution in front of me, but my understanding is that the time is from the lodgement of an appeal. But, if that is not the case, please let me know and I will—

MR DEPUTY SPEAKER: I am being advised by the Clerk that it is subject to sub judice because it is within that 28 days of a DPP timeframe to appeal. Therefore, I would ask that you not refer to the details of the case in the remainder of your speech. You may continue, Mr Cocks. Please restart the time.

MR COCKS: It is extraordinarily difficult, Mr Deputy Speaker, to express the degree of pain that comes as you read through the judgment in this case. The details, which I am not allowed to speak of here today, are deeply disturbing. The section of this motion that the government wishes to erase goes to the statements of the judge in his decision, and I quote, "I accept his prior lack of sexual experience and inevitably limited insight into societal"—

MR DEPUTY SPEAKER: Mr Cocks, I am sorry, but you will not be able to refer to details arising out of the case either.

MR COCKS: I believe this is actually within the motion. Is that right?

Ms Cheyne: No. Mr Cocks, this might result in an outcome, ultimately, that is not what you want. Do not pre-empt.

MR COCKS: Mr Deputy Speaker, the proposition that anyone arriving from anywhere, that anyone, would have no understanding or a reduced understanding of the Australian culture when it comes to expectations—

Members interjecting—

MR DEPUTY SPEAKER: Members, it is available in terms of appeal and, as mentioned by the Attorney-General, we are in a 28-day period. You were warned at the start by the Assistant Speaker with the statement about sub judice—

MR COCKS: I understand, Mr Deputy Speaker.

MR DEPUTY SPEAKER: We are totally fine in terms of the content of the motion. It is just that referring to details of the particular case in the speeches is problematic, and I would encourage all members that we do not wish to enter such a realm.

MR COCKS: Let me just say that consent is not some obscure Australian cultural practice. Rape is not only wrong after someone has spent enough time living in Canberra. Rape as a crime is about as close to a universally held principle today as you can get. Recognition of conduct is criminal. It spans cultures and continents, because rape is not just a momentary lapse; rape is a sustained assault. It is a torture inflicted upon another human being for the perpetrator's morally bankrupt self-satisfaction. Rape is as illegal and morally wrong in every nation as it is in Australia. It would be just as illegal and wrong in Argentina, in Bangladesh, in Brazil, in Canada, in Chile, in China, in Egypt, in Ethiopia, in Fiji, in France, in Germany, in Ghana, in India, in Indonesia, in Iran, in Israel, in Japan, in Kenya, in Mexico, in Morocco, in Russia, in Saudi Arabia, in Turkey and in the USA. I can find no country where rape is accepted. Rape is wrong, no matter where you are from.

We should not accept that it is in any way inevitable that someone arriving in our country would not understand that and nor should we ever accept that a lack of experience would somehow justify someone's moral culpability for a violent rape. In no way do you need sexual experience to understand the word "stop". You do not need to have lost your virginity to understand that physically restraining someone against their will just so you can have sex with them is wrong. No matter what age you are, there has to be some understanding. I believe 16-year-olds can, actually, tell right from wrong. You do not have to have sex to know that rape is bad. You do not need to have had sex to understand that no means no.

I understand that sentencing is complicated, that judicial independence is fundamental to our system of government. But respecting judicial independence does not require this Assembly to remain silent when a judgment exposes something in our laws or sentencing framework is broken—and, frankly, something must be broken, if this is where we are today. No victim who has endured a violent sexual assault should ever have to read a judgment and come away believing that the system somehow considered their attack less serious because of factors such as these. Nor should any other woman looking at this case wonder whether it is worth going through the ordeal of reporting her own assault and reliving that experience if the perpetrator might avoid prison.

I ask everyone in this place to try and put yourself in the position of a young woman and her family. Think of your own family members, the young women in your lives. Imagine if someone you know and care for was in the same situation. How would you react? Imagine someone who said stop, someone who clearly indicated they did not want it, and the person assaulting them continued. (*Extension of time granted.*) Imagine watching them go through everything that follows—the courage it takes to report, to give evidence and to relive what happened and then wait for the justice system to reach an outcome. Then imagine one more thing: imagine standing in front of her and explaining that a person who did that to them would not spend a single night in prison. What could possibly undermine your faith in the justice system more than that?

We, as members of this Assembly, should never accept that for someone we love and we should never accept it for the people we represent. Every single person in this chamber has the duty to push for change. There is never an excuse for rape. It must not be excused. It must not be minimised. There is right and wrong and "no" means no. Every person living in this community deserves the protection of that basic standard.

That means that every person living in our community must be held to that standard and when somebody says “stop”, there is no doubt what should happen—and, when they do not stop, when they are raped, there is no doubt where we should stand.

I ask members to support the original motion and to support a serious examination of what has occurred here and what needs to change. I say to the young woman and to anyone who has experienced a similar assault: What happened to you was wrong. It was not your fault. The responsibility lies with the person who assaulted you. You deserve to be heard, treated with dignity and supported in your recovery.

MR CAIN (Ginninderra) (4.36): I will speak briefly to a motion that has canvassed so many important issues. I want to thank the shadow attorney-general, Ms Barry, for bringing this matter before us this afternoon.

I certainly support Ms Barry’s motion, because the case for a broad review of sentencing in the ACT is long overdue, and not because of the recent decision alone. People want confidence that sentences in our justice system reflect the seriousness of the crime—of course, with many factors needing to be considered—recognise the harm to the victim as a priority, in my opinion, protect the community, and send a strong message of deterrence to the community. Rehabilitation, of course, matters, particularly for young offenders, but so do accountability, deterrence and, indeed, punishment.

We do need, as Ms Barry has called for, an independent review to examine why we are not getting the balance right, between so many competing issues. As members would be aware, I am delighted, and it is a sobering honour, to be sponsoring a petition that was launched a week ago, calling for a public inquiry. Obviously, it will have its own journey within this place, beyond today. It also reflects having reached, within a week, nearly 650 signatures—within a week. In fact, it reached 500 within a few days. It certainly reflects wide community concern about whether our justice system, particularly the sentencing, is meeting community expectations. I suspect that everyone here would agree that it is not. I have not heard a contrary view to that position.

We, of course, respect judicial independence, but this Assembly also has a very significant responsibility in crafting laws that meet the expectations of our community. Ultimately, it is the community who has put us in this place, to do this very job.

I support Ms Barry’s motion, and certainly not the toning down that the Attorney-General wishes to present. I look forward to members reconsidering some of the statements they have made this afternoon and their position on the amendments, and to fully support the motion as presented by our shadow attorney-general.

MS BARRY (Ginninderra) (4.39): In speaking to the amendments and in closing, I have read several commentaries about this matter, both online and in conversations around Canberra. One of the comments was, “Nothing will change. That motion will be defeated.” I said, “No, of course not.” I believed that members in this place would listen and do the right thing. I thank members for their contributions. I thank Mrs Morris and Mr Cocks. It is very unusual to see Mr Cocks so emotional. I thank Mr Cain, Ms Vassarotti, Mr Emerson and Ms Carrick.

There are fundamental things that need to be addressed in all the responses that I have

heard, particularly from the Greens, Mr Emerson and the government. I will go first to Ms Vassarotti's comments around rehabilitation and how that can result in better outcomes. While I agree with those statements, there is no evidence that rehabilitation is better than incarceration. We do not have that evidence before us. There is no data. This was an opportunity to identify to the community that rehabilitation leads to better outcomes, and not just by way of some literature or written review somewhere; this was an opportunity finally to prove to the community that rehabilitation offers better outcomes. This was the opportunity and, sadly, it will be missed.

Ms Vassarotti and the Attorney-General also made comments around paragraph (3)(a) of the motion. I appreciate that a legal term was used in that drafting. But let me make it really clear that if the legislation is drafted to provide power to the Attorney-General to appeal a matter where a sentence is manifestly inadequate, first of all, I am not talking about the current matter. Of course, there is no benefit to having that power for the current matter, because we are looking at sentencing more generally. It is not necessarily about this particular matter; it is that the community have said to us several times that they are not satisfied with sentencing outcomes in the ACT.

I will quickly read from a media statement from the Queensland Attorney-General. It says, "I have today instructed the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions to lodge an appeal against the sentence handed down in the Childrens Court." That instruction was in her name. You do not just pluck a prosecutor out of thin air when you instruct, or when you decide to commence proceedings in your name. It is still the Crown prosecution that prepares the brief of evidence. However, it is in the Attorney-General's name. You do not set up a new office to run that prosecution on your behalf. It is still an instruction sent to the Crown prosecution to put that brief together on your behalf. I appreciate that that may be confusing for some here, but Ms Deb Frecklington has practised for way longer, I think, than I have, so I am sure she has the wording right.

I want to put on the record some of the things that have been missed in the debate on this motion, or in the government's amendments. First of all, we will not be supporting the amendments, because they water down the original motion. The government has, in its amendments, removed paragraph (3)(b)(iv), "forms of imprisonment and attached conditions", and the "non-parole periods and the decision-making function and transparency of the ACT Sentence Administration Board". These are all relevant factors to consider when you are considering the sentencing framework in its totality, whether or not they meet community expectations. That is a factor that you must consider if you are doing a holistic review.

Most importantly, the government has refused to mark itself against its own policies. It has removed paragraph (3)(c), particularly whether the government's stated criminal justice policy objectives and community expectations have been achieved. The reason is because it already knows the answer. It already knows that it is not meeting its own justice objectives. Recidivism rates are high. We have a reported 288 per cent increase in crime—violent sexual offences. It is not meeting its policy objectives, and it knows that, which is why it is seeking to remove that section.

Finally, it is actually quite disturbing, concerning and disappointing that the outcome today is that the government, the Greens, Mr Emerson and Ms Carrick have decided that, sadly, this motion is not worth supporting. What I would have expected,

particularly around paragraph (3)(a), is some investigation into how it is applicable in other states, and not just a blanket “no”. These are solutions. The community wants solutions, and we are putting forward those solutions. Again, this Assembly, sadly, has said no.

I commend the motion to the Assembly and thank everyone who has contributed to this debate.

Question put:

That the amendments be agreed to.

The Assembly voted—

The Assembly voted—

Ayes, 16

Andrew Barr	Suzanne Orr
Yvette Berry	Marisa Paterson
Andrew Braddock	Chris Steel
Fiona Carrick	Rachel Stephen-Smith
Leanne Castley	Caitlin Tough
Tara Cheyne	Rebecca Vassarotti
Jo Clay	Taimus Werner-Gibblings
Thomas Emerson	
Laura Nuttall	

Noes, 7

Chiaka Barry
Peter Cain
Ed Cocks
Jeremy Hanson
James Milligan
Deborah Morris
Mark Parton

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Amendments agreed to.

Original question, as amended, resolved in the affirmative.

Land—urban growth boundary

MS CASTLEY (Yerrabi) (4.51): I move:

That this Assembly:

(1) notes that:

- (a) the Assembly agreed to a motion on 10 April 2025 to establish an Urban Growth Boundary (UGB) following the *ACT State of the Environment Report 2023* and a 2024 election policy of the ACT Greens;
- (b) the stated purpose of the UGB is to protect land of environmental and agricultural value while supporting the Territory’s long-term housing and employment needs;
- (c) the Government has agreed to formalise the UGB policy through an amendment to the Territory Plan by June 2027;
- (d) in response to question on notice No 122 of the Select Committee on

Estimates 2026-2027, the Minister for Planning and Sustainable Development stated that no alternative policies have been considered by the Government; and

- (e) the Minister for Planning and Sustainable Development has stated the UGB is being considered through the development of a new planning and transport strategy, with a UGB to be progressed through a future major plan amendment;
- (2) further notes that:
 - (a) housing affordability is a critically important issue for Canberrans, with research by Building a Better Canberra showing the typical house price rising from 2.5 to 2.9 years of median income in 1981 to 7.3 years today;
 - (b) Reserve Bank of Australia research has identified supply as the key driver of affordability, finding that as a rule of thumb, every 1 percent increase in the number of dwellings, when driven by an increase in supply, lowers the cost of housing by 2.5 percent; and
 - (c) by restricting new residential land release, the UGB has the potential to seriously impact housing supply and affordability in the ACT, which could substantially accelerate housing development and urban sprawl beyond the Territory's borders; and
- (3) calls on the Government to:
 - (a) commission an independent assessment of the impact of the UGB on land supply and housing affordability over the long term and publish this as a supporting report to the draft planning and transport strategy; and
 - (b) publish the draft planning and transport strategy alongside any future major plan amendment to establish a UGB.

Housing affordability is one of the biggest issues facing the ACT. For the last two decades, successive ACT governments have failed to build enough housing, and enough diversity of housing, to ensure that there are enough homes to suit the needs of everyone in our community. The inevitable result of this is that prices are higher than they would otherwise be. In 1981, a Canberran with a median income could purchase a typical home for around 2½ years of their earnings. Today, they would need more than seven years of earnings, which means housing is now three times as expensive as it used to be.

This does not just affect aspiring home owners. These prices mean that rents are too high. It means that Canberrans are putting more money into mortgages and less into local businesses, including our night-time economy. It means that people—particularly couples and young families—are leaving the territory, so the taxes that each of us pays have to be higher.

Housing affordability is an issue which needs to be urgently addressed. But if we cannot fix the barriers to housing affordability this term, we at least need to focus on not making the problem worse. I am worried that this could be one of the issues with legislating for an urban growth boundary. By restricting new greenfields developments in the ACT, an urban growth boundary could mean that we significantly and permanently reduce the supply of new housing. While the intention is to replace greenfields projects with urban infill, I am not confident that the territory will be able to deliver enough new dwellings to keep up with demand, and I am not confident that

the territory will deliver the types of housing that Canberrans want. This has certainly been the experience in recent years.

If that is borne out, the boundary will mean higher prices, especially for the types of housing that are in most demand. That includes detached housing and dwellings with three or more bedrooms. A study of an equivalent policy in the UK found that removing these “green belts”, as they called them, would reduce housing prices by as much as 20 per cent. Similar research has prompted local governments around the world, including Adelaide and Auckland, to reconsider their growth boundaries and green belts because of their effects on housing affordability.

I recognise that the goal of the urban growth boundary is to protect sensitive and endangered environmental domains around the ACT, but I am concerned that we are proceeding down this path without considering the wider impacts of the policy or evaluating alternative policies that could deliver environmental protection without hurting housing affordability.

With this motion, I am asking the government to look at the impact of the proposed boundary on supply and affordability before it proceeds to legislation. We deserve to have an informed understanding of the costs and benefits before we make a final decision on the policy, because I think most of us recognise that housing affordability is a critical problem for the ACT, and that we should not be taking unnecessary steps to make that problem worse.

MR STEEL (Murrumbidgee—Treasurer, Minister for Planning and Sustainable Development, Minister for Heritage, and Minister for Sport and Recreation) (4.55): I thank Ms Castley for bringing forward the motion. The government will be supporting it, and I would like to thank Ms Castley for her good-faith engagement to determine an achievable outcome. Today’s debate follows on from last year’s Assembly resolution regarding the urban growth boundary, as brought forward by Ms Clay.

The government agrees that there is value in understanding the implications of the urban growth boundary on land supply and housing affordability. Considering the impact on the market is an important part of delivering on this policy. I would like to assure members that work on an urban growth boundary is well underway. The government is already working to publish the draft planning and transport strategy, alongside a future draft major plan amendment, in line with our previous commitments.

Today’s motion draws our attention to setting a boundary in the context of Canberra’s overall capacity for growth. We will need to consider opportunities for new housing within the existing urban area, future greenfield supply and infrastructure capacity.

The government has been hard at work to ensure that housing is affordable and available. That is why we are taking unprecedented action through planning reform, land supply, tax changes and reforms, our construction productivity agenda, skills investment, and much more to enable more homes, more housing choice and more options for Canberrans to have a home which meets the needs of where they are in life.

At the same time, we recognise the importance of protecting our non-urban landscape, including what Ms Castley referred to as “green belts”, including hills, ridges and

buffers, mountains and bushland, and river corridors. Canberra is growing, and we need to plan for a future that delivers housing while protecting the green spaces that make this city enjoyable and sustainable.

Future growth will not be delivered through greenfields development alone. We will need more homes within our existing urban footprint to meet Canberra's needs into the future. It is important for Canberrans to understand what all parties in this chamber and the Independents have in mind for future development.

The government's vision for Canberra's future is for more transit-oriented development, with more homes in well-located areas, close to good public transport, and close to jobs, services and amenities. Our investments in light rail and additional rapid bus services will provide the transport infrastructure needed to support more homes, while ensuring that people are well-connected to work, services, and recreation and social facilities. The government's transit-oriented development policy is already evident in major plan amendments in the northern gateway, as well as the work that is being undertaken on the Southern Gateway Planning and Design Framework.

Meeting the needs of Canberra's growing population while preserving the amenity we enjoy means more mid-rise housing in appropriate locations, as well as further delivery of more of the low-rise missing middle housing typologies, including through our commitment to and funding of the Canberra House Pattern Book. We need to consider how much housing Canberra will need, where that housing can be accommodated, what infrastructure will be required to support it, and how people will move around the city in the future.

We need to make sure that our planning system continues to provide sufficient capacity for new housing, and I mean zoned capacity. We also need to make sure growth occurs where it can be supported by transport, utilities, schools, community facilities and other infrastructure. That is one of the reasons why we are bringing planning and transport together through a new strategy. It will allow us to take a more coordinated view of where people live, where jobs and services are located, how people travel between them, and what infrastructure will be required as Canberra grows.

An urban growth boundary needs to sit within a clear strategy for how Canberra accommodates future population growth and additional housing. That includes where we provide opportunities for more homes, where greenfield development may occur, how we connect communities with public transport, and how we sequence infrastructure and services. Considering these matters together will allow the community to understand the choices involved and participate meaningfully in the future planning of our city.

Canberra will continue to grow. Our responsibility is to continue to manage that growth well—delivering more homes and more housing choice, making it easier for people to live close to jobs, services and good public transport, and protecting the natural environment and landscapes that are such an important part of Canberra. The Planning and Transport Strategy is about bringing those objectives together with the urban growth boundary, forming part of that broader conversation about Canberra's future.

The assessment proposed by this motion is in line with the work that the government is

already doing to plan for Canberra's future. We have, from the beginning of this term, put housing supply and housing affordability at the forefront of our planning changes, and we will continue to do that as we develop an urban growth boundary. I commend the motion to the Assembly.

MS CLAY (Ginninderra) (5.00): I would like to speak to the motion that Ms Castley has brought today about assessing the impact of the urban growth boundary on land supply and housing affordability. The report on this assessment will be published as a supporting report to the planning and transport strategy and the draft major plan amendment that will establish the urban growth boundary in June 2027. The ACT Greens will support this motion. More information is always useful.

The Greens have long advocated for an increase in density and for an urban growth boundary. For us these two things really go together. We need to provide more homes for our people, and we need to do this while protecting our environment. We have to stop endless sprawl, which is bad for our people and our planet. Setting an urban growth boundary will let us make better use of Canberra's existing footprint to provide homes. People need those homes close to shops, public transport, jobs, schools and community facilities. Putting more homes in these locations means less commuting and less travel. It cuts household costs for travel. It cuts climate emissions. It lets people live close to the things they need to access every day. These homes are more environmentally sustainable, they are cheaper to run and they provide better lives for the people who live in them, rather than making people get stuck in endless traffic.

The 2023 *State of the Environment Report* by then Commissioner for Sustainability and the Environment talked at length about the continued and relentless degradation of our environment, such as the removal of box gum woodlands and rare grasslands and the removal of habitat trees used by swift parrots and superb parrots. It was not surprising that given these concerns the first recommendation of her report was to legislate an urban growth boundary to contain urban expansion and achieve a compact, liveable, efficiently designed Canberra. That is why other cities have set an urban growth boundary. Urban growth boundaries have been established in Melbourne and Adelaide. Many other cities around the world have one, like Portland in the USA. That boundary provides certainty about what to build and where to build it, and it lets everyone see what shape the city will take.

That is why I brought the motion on 10 April 2025 to set city limits and protect the western edge. The motion called for an urban growth boundary to be set this term, with an amendment to the Territory Plan establishing the urban growth boundary released by June 2027. When setting the boundary, the motion called for, amongst other things, the preservation of land with environmental values and the need to protect the western edge and the preservation of agricultural land use, as established in the Eastern Broadacre study. Public consultation on the urban growth boundary was called for, as were six-monthly statements on progress. It is really good to see that we are making progress on this. It is equally good to see that we are making progress on the missing middle reforms that will help us have more homes within our existing footprint.

Until recently it was not possible to build diverse housing types in many of these locations, like rowhouses and town houses and dual and tri occupancies. With the passage of the missing middle housing planning reforms, there is an increased

opportunity for people to build the house that better suits their needs in the right location. The bonus of providing more diverse housing is that we get greater density and we get more choices of homes within our footprint.

Today's motion is concerned about the cost of building homes, and the Greens are also really worried about housing costs, especially the costs for those who are renting or buying homes. It is another problem of endless sprawl and greenfield development; the cost of that, the financial cost, is really high. Endless sprawl is more expensive to build. In 2018 the ACT government commissioned AECOM to undertake a comparative cost study of greenfield and infill developments. That report found that it is more expensive for government to build greenfield than it is to build infill because major infrastructure like new roads, new powerlines, new pipes for sewerage and water, new schools and other services are needed when you build greenfield. The report found that the average cost of development in Whitlam was around \$68,000 per home compared to \$6,500 per home in Woden and \$23,000 per home in the Campbell 5 development.

Fortunately, Canberra has a lot of land that is available for development. By any measure Canberra is big in size, but our density is low. In part, that has been driven by the reserves, the hills and the ridges, which a lot of people love about our city, and by the previous planning policies that shaped this city, but we still have a lot of opportunities for both infill and for more greenfield within our footprint. That includes the suburbs that we have begun, like Ginninderry, Gungahlin, Lawson, Taylor and Throsby, as well as the remainder of Molonglo. We should also continue work on areas we have identified as possible suitable developments, like CSIRO Ginninderra, which of course also means looking really closely at the ecological and environmental value of those areas and thinking about what the best use for that land is.

The Thoroughbred Park precinct is another great opportunity. That is why the Greens have championed putting a whole suburb in there, including public housing, shops, services, parks, paths and a school. It is such a great opportunity right now, and it can look after future generations. Government has to plan properly for that whole area and make sure that public interest is put first. We need a minimum reasonable amount of public housing, like 10 per cent of all homes. We need schools. We need services. I was disappointed recently that Labor and the Liberals did not agree to committing to the public interest for that precinct and setting some of those minimum standards, but I remain hopeful we will get proper public housing and schools and services there.

There are a lot of views about possible solutions to the current housing crisis. Increasing housing supply is clear, and it is supported by every member in here, but supply alone will not solve housing affordability. Research by the Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute in 2017 questioned whether it will cause house prices to drop to levels that are affordable for people on low incomes. More recently, research undertaken by the University of New South Wales showed that building more apartments will not solve Australia's housing affordability crisis, with system-wide price pressures in the freestanding housing market having a considerable impact on the whole housing system. That is why government must deliver public housing and must facilitate community housing rather than simply increasing the supply of privately developed homes. Privately developed homes may not be affordable to many Canberrans. Most of them are not. We know this. That is why government also has to have that direct involvement to make sure that there is public and community housing

as well.

I want to thank Ms Castley for the opportunity to talk about the significant planning changes that will hopefully lead to more diverse housing in our established suburbs. I want to thank Minister Steel for the work underway to deliver an urban growth boundary major plan amendment, a planning and transport strategy and now a study into the impact of the urban growth boundary on housing affordability and supply.

The motion I put up that was agreed in April 2025 committed to the urban growth boundary major plan amendment being in place by June 2027, and I note the minister has repeatedly confirmed those timeframes, which is really pleasing to hear. We look forward to continuing to work with the minister and all members on using our planning system to deliver better housing opportunities, while also providing better protection for important environmental and ecological communities and providing much, much more climate-resilient and climate-friendly development in Canberra.

MR EMERSON (Kurrajong) (5.08): I thank Ms Castley for bringing forward this motion today. I am very happy to support its calls. Housing affordability is one of the biggest challenges facing Canberrans, especially the many young Canberrans who live in Kurrajong. More people are finding it harder to buy a home in an area they want to live in, harder to find a rental they can afford and harder to lay down long-term roots in the city they call home. We need to act to increase housing supply and to make sure future and current generations can actually afford to live here, and given that I absolutely support the call to assess the impacts of the urban growth boundary or the proposed urban growth boundary on housing supply and affordability in the ACT.

With regard to any potential insinuation that that boundary might be inherently antithetical to affordable housing and supply, I would want to be clear that I would reject that. As we discuss how these two things trade off with one another and whether or not that framing is appropriate, I think we also need to ask a broader question, and it has been raised by members through the debate: what is the Canberra we actually want to live in? Can we articulate and deliver a vision for Canberra as a city that does not have to choose between affordable housing and protecting our environment? I think that is what most Canberrans want, and it is incumbent on us in this place to make decisions that align with that vision, not with a territory that has to trade off between habitat for our beloved gang-gangs and homes for future generations, but a city that delivers both—a city that can walk and chew gum at the same time and give a speech at the same time as that; a city that gets densification, missing middle housing, efficient and inclusive public transport and environmental conservation right; a city where people can afford a home without sacrificing the natural environment that makes Canberra such a remarkable place to live; a city where we can enjoy our bush capital cake and eat our housing affordability too.

Canberrans consistently tell me one of the things that is most important to them is their natural environment—our open spaces, our reserves, our incredible wildlife and our connection to nature, Namadgi, the Brindies, Mount Ainslie, Black Mountain, Mount Taylor, Isaacs Ridge. All of us in Canberra have a special patch of bush that we are close enough to to call our backyard. These places and the values we uphold in protecting them from development are not obstacles to good planning and do not have to be obstacles to housing affordability; they are part of what makes Canberra Canberra.

That is why, although I support this motion, I also absolutely support the intent of the urban growth boundary, which is to protect areas of environmental value around Canberra, particularly on our ecologically and culturally significant western edge. Equally, I absolutely agree that housing affordability and supply must remain front and centre as a priority for this Assembly and obviously for many Assemblies to come. If we are going to limit outward expansion, as I think we should, we need a credible plan for accommodating the growth we know is coming within our existing urban footprint, with planning and construction policy settings that allow quality homes within that footprint to be delivered.

I do not think the answer to housing affordability is endless urban sprawl. Other jurisdictions might choose that answer, but it does not mean we have to. Not only does pushing further and further out come with significant infrastructure costs, longer commutes, greater car dependence and the gradual loss of the landscapes that define our territory, it also means sacrificing the opportunity to encourage social cohesion that can happen around our public third spaces and with sensible community-oriented community-building densification. To embrace missing middle housing and thoughtful urban densification as a dual solution to both our housing and environmental crises—more townhouses, terraces and low-rise apartments in the right locations, with the right services, that can provide housing choice for all Canberrans, while supporting vibrant local centres and alternative modes of transport.

Canberra should be a model city when it comes to sustainability, and we need to do a lot more to make that happen. An urban growth boundary alone will not ensure that occurs, but it sets constraints for driving a far greater focus on sustainability in our decisions about land use in the ACT and for building a more compact Canberra where people develop close connections to their neighbours, where we feel a sense of shared ownership over our shared spaces, where we spend more time in them, where we are encouraged to play a role in their cultivation, where active and public transport become genuinely appealing transport options, where current and future residents share together in the benefits of the changes that are being made to our city's urban form, where more people can afford to live close to where they work, learn, and play and where we both preserve and enhance the incredible ecological diversity of the unique country we are fortunate to call home.

That is the Canberra I am keen to see. That is the Canberra I want for our community, for my kids, for their kids. Establishing an urban growth boundary, delivering an integrated planning and transport strategy, tackling our housing crisis, making the missing middle housing reforms a success—these threads of work need to occur concurrently and be delivered cohesively in order to build the Canberra we want for generations to come. That is my read of what is at the heart of Ms Castley's calls in her motion today, which, again, is why I am happy to support its passage.

MRS MORRIS (Brindabella) (5.13): I want to thank Ms Castley for bringing this motion to the Assembly today, because this motion before us deals with one of the most important policy decisions that we confront and that has received considerable attention in this Assembly and in the community. Housing affordability in Canberra is a very serious and pressing social problem that so many Canberra families are wrestling and confronted with on what seems to be almost a daily basis. Prices of all housing types

have increased significantly over recent years, and this affects buyers and renters too. It affects all housing types—apartments, townhouses and standalone houses.

Part of the housing affordability crisis can be explained by the costs of development and construction, affected by general economic conditions, and the specific state of the housing sector, but also by often excessive and costly government regulation. Another driver of price and housing affordability is land supply. In the ACT land supply is driven by the act government's land release program. A noticeable feature of this program is the limited supply of blocks of land for standalone housing. This has driven prices in the ACT to levels beyond the means of many Canberrans, particularly of Canberra families, who need space and room for their families to grow. This has resulted in a booming housing market across the border, including Googong, Jumping Creek, Bungendore and Murrumbateman.

A 2025 report by the Centre for International Economics found that Canberra had a higher total cost for a new greenfield house and land package than every capital city, including Sydney. The government's missing middle policy aims to address some of this pressure on ACT house prices by facilitating redevelopment of existing blocks in of land in existing suburbs. The Canberra Liberals have supported this policy but note that it is only one policy lever available to the government and that it will not greatly address the price disparity between greenfield developments in Canberra and just over the border.

If the government is going to legislate an urban growth boundary on future development in Canberra, it cannot be implemented in a thoughtless way as it will undoubtedly exacerbate existing restrictions on land supply and exacerbate the housing affordability crisis in the ACT, which is something that this Assembly has recognised—that the ACT is grappling with a housing crisis. The result of getting this policy wrong will be even more development across the border and a worsening housing crisis in Canberra.

The Canberra Liberals therefore support this motion, Canberrans want political decisions to be based on the best available evidence. An independent and professional assessment of the impact of any proposed urban growth boundary on land supply and housing affordability is essential to good decision-making about the future of the city, because our priority must always be to ensure that every Canberran has a roof over their head, that they can afford housing and their homes and that there is actual, genuine choice. We cannot risk an urban growth boundary that drives up costs and limits the supply of housing or undermines genuine choice in housing that Canberrans expect to have. I thank Ms Castley for her motion today, and I commend it to the Assembly.

MS CARRICK (Murrumbidgee) (5.17): I thank Ms Castley for bringing forward this motion. I rise to speak on the importance of protecting the western edge and supporting evidence-based planning for Canberra's future. The western edge is one of the ACT's most environmentally significant landscapes. It contains important biodiversity corridors, native grasslands, woodlands, wildlife habitat and catchment values that help connect the urban area with the surrounding natural environment. It is also part of the landscape that gives Canberra its unique character as a city within a park. The urban growth boundary is intended to recognise and protect these values, ensuring that future growth does not come at the expense of irreplaceable environmental assets.

At the same time, we cannot ignore the very real concerns that many Canberrans have about housing affordability and housing supply. These are legitimate issues that deserve careful consideration. Good planning requires us to balance environmental protection with the need to ensure that people can continue to find a home they can afford in Canberra. That is why I support the proposal for an independent assessment of the long-term impacts of the urban growth boundary on land supply and housing affordability.

Whatever view members take on the urban growth boundary itself, we should all support transparent, evidence-based decision-making. An independent assessment would help ensure the community understands the likely benefits, costs and trade-offs before major planning decisions are finalised. Protecting the environment values of the western edge and maintaining a clear urban growth boundary should not be incompatible with a rigorous examination of housing outcomes. Canberra will be best served by a planning framework that is informed by robust evidence, protects our natural environment and ensures future generations can continue to live and thrive in our city.

MS CASTLEY (Yerrabi) (5.20), in reply: In closing, I thank the minister and his office for their engagement on this motion—it was very helpful—the other officers that I have spoken to and those who came into my office to talk through any questions that they had about the motion. I really appreciate their time and everybody’s agreement on this one.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Papers

Motion to take note of papers

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

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

Statements by members

Dr Helen Haines MP—attack

MR BARR (Kurrajong—Chief Minister, Minister for Trade, Investment and the Knowledge Economy, Minister for Tourism and Events, and Minister for Major Projects) (5.21): The attack on Helen Haines yesterday afternoon is deeply shocking, and my thoughts and those of the government, and I am sure of everyone in this place, are with Helen, her family, friends and staff at what must be an incredibly distressing time. We all know public life comes with many challenges, but no-one should face violence, threats or intimidation while serving their community. Helen is widely respected for her commitment to public service, and this incident has clearly been felt deeply by colleagues across the political spectrum and across all Australian parliaments.

Of course, incidents like this affect more than just the individual involved; they are felt by families, staff, volunteers and the broader communities that the elected representatives serve. Everyone who participates in our democracy, whether as an

elected representative, a staff member or a member of the public, deserves to be able to do so safely and with confidence that disagreements will never escalate into violence. While there will rightly be discussions about security and safety, today the focus must be on Helen and those closest to her.

This is also a moment for all of us to reflect on the tone of our public debate. We can and we will disagree strongly on issues and ideas, but we must never lose sight of our shared humanity. Respect, decency and civility are not signs of weakness; they are essential to a healthy democracy and to keeping people safe who serve our community.

Youth—Raise Our Voice in Parliament

MR PARTON (Brindabella—Leader of the Opposition) (5.22): I stand today as part of the Raise Our Voice in parliament campaign, which aims to amplify the voices of young people under 25 in parliament by having their local representative read speeches written by their young constituents. This is a beautiful thing, and I am proud to participate in this year's campaign by reading 16-year-old Allina's speech. These are her words—Allina from Tuggeranong:

You have heard of it already, name up in lights, featured in titles and news articles across the globe. Artificial Intelligence is the future of society or, should I say, the end of it. AI is being introduced in the daily life at an alarming rate. It is at a point where people can no longer tell what is real or what is it not. It targets our jobs, our environment, our lives. Young people will have to live and work in a future where we will be seen as inferior to the bots that surfaced years after we were born. I wrote a poem, fuelled by rage from exactly this, and I would like to read an extract:

“It feeds on our soul, our art, not our law. The government must implement strict laws and regulations about AI usage. It uses our words, our art and our resources. Protect the economy. Protect the environment. Protect the people. That is who you serve. I could list the statistics behind it all but let us just say this: AI should be left out of employment, it should be left out of schools, out of homes, out of everything. It damages a lot more than it will ever help. It just isn't worth it.”

Thank you, Allina

Youth—Raise Our Voice in Parliament

MR CAIN (Ginninderra) (5.24): I similarly present a speech from a participant in the Youth Voice in Parliament program, a wonderful initiative led by Raise Our Voice in Australia which gives young Australians the opportunity to have their voices heard in this chamber. It is my privilege to read a speech on behalf and written by Asher, who is 13 years old in Year 7 in a local high school. These are his words:

University is very expensive, something many young Australians are worried about. Families and students save for years, and the debts still last into adulthood, something that haunts all students. As an aspiring student, I would love to go to university but these obstacles are always at the back of my mind. I want to go to university to gain knowledge and have more job opportunities. It is something that we need to consider.

If we want more doctors, nurses and other occupations, we need to help young Australians get into university so we can support a future Australia. How many talented students are we losing because education is out of reach? We need to support the people who support us. What nation charges its future? Let's change the lock to the welcome mat. We need the university to be a place to be excited for rather than afraid of, a place of learning and fun, not crippling debt. We need to build a stronger Australia starting with this.

Youth—Raise Our Voice in Parliament

MS LEE (Kurrajong) (5.26): I am also very proud to be participating in the Raise Our Voice Australia campaign and the reception that we saw this week in the Assembly. I just want to give a shout out to Ashleigh Streeter-Jones, the founder. This is a speech written by Hugh, a 25-year-old resident and young person in Kurrajong.

One of the big issues facing my future, is a world increasingly reliant on, or integrated with artificial intelligence, as well as the people that control it.

The individuals and companies responsible for the ever increasing ubiquitousness and capacity of large language models, are pursuing artificial general intelligence with stupefyingly reckless abandon.

They were taught to move fast and break things: not to consider the impacts they may have on human jobs and labour, environmental degradation, the democratic process and even reality itself.

Additionally, they are protecting themselves through a suicide pact with the global economy: their speculative bubble pops and millions of people will suffer in a global market crash that will dwarf the 2008 Global Financial Crisis. Australia cannot continue to reward these people, companies and their efforts.

I wish for the Parliament to enact a moratorium on data centre construction, require future and existing data centres to generate 100% of their power and source 100% of their water sustainably, close tax loopholes for AI companies so they pay their fair share, and call for the creation of an independently written Internet Bill of Rights to avoid internet companies harvesting the data of Australian citizens to train AI.

Youth—Raise Our Voice in Parliament

MR EMERSON (Kurrajong) (5.27): This is a speech written by Maddie, who is 24 years old and lives in my electorate, as part of the Raise Our Voice in Parliament campaign:

The issue that is causing me the most anxiety about the future is artificial intelligence. The profound impact this is having on young people's mental health along with the ever-shortening intentions spans and creative thinking are a few of the challenges we see today. Bullying and misogyny have always been a topical issue for young women. As our technology evolves, so do many mechanisms of harming young people.

Cyberbullying was something that our parents never experienced, and now it has surpassed unkind messages on the internet to using AI to create false imagery and

impersonation. Deep fakes are being created of young women in vulnerable and explicit scenarios and posted to the internet or shared around schools without their consent. This has caused serious harm on multiple occasions and has even taken the lives of young women in Australia.

There are countless things happening on the internet every day that are harming young people that we are not aware of. What we need is stronger legislation and policy around the safety standards and ethical use of AI, as well as holding people accountable when they use AI to harm others, not only when it is sexual in nature.

Multicultural affairs—Multicultural Seniors Information Session

MR BRADDOCK (Yerrabi) (5.29): I had the pleasure of joining the Migrant and Refugee Settlement Services multicultural seniors information session last week, and I just wanted to call out that particular event. The information session catered for over 120 seniors from culturally diverse backgrounds in an interactive program covering topics such as elder abuse, dementia, cyber safety, falls risk, home care, amongst others. It also included speakers from the Council on the Ageing, ADACAS and Carers ACT. I would like to congratulate Shobha Varkey and Nishi Puri and everyone else who contributed to make this event a success. Such events are important in ensuring all members of our community are informed, connected and able access critical services.

Sport and recreation—proposed stadium

MR MILLIGAN (Yerrabi) (5.29): Every great idea starts with a spark, and right here in Canberra there are people with ideas that could become something extraordinary. That is what the private sector does. It sees an opportunity, it invests in ideas and it embraces innovation. Just look at the Canberra Airport and its partners, who have engaged world-leading stadium designers to explore a new stadium in the city. There is huge economic benefit that will come from it. A new modern stadium will bring major sporting events. It would bring concerts and visitors to the heart of this city. Hotels, restaurants, cafes and local businesses would also benefit from this type of investment—more visitors, more spending, more jobs and more opportunity. Private industry is showing the initiative that Canberrans have been waiting to see.

But a spark needs the right conditions to become a flame, and government has the opportunity to fan those flames. Our economy is changing, the way we work is changing, the way we do business is changing, and we need to create opportunities in this environment that we are in. We cannot keep relying on the same old thinking and expect different results. Canberra has enormous potential, and there are people ready to help realise it.

Discussion concluded.

Adjournment

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

That the Assembly do now adjourn.

Dr Helen Haines MP—attack

MR PARTON (Brindabella—Leader of the Opposition) (5.31): I rise to speak briefly about the horrific attack on the federal member for Indi in Wangaratta yesterday afternoon. I would like to echo the words from the Chief Minister earlier on today: like most Australians I was shaken by this unthinkable attack which has caused serious injury to the independent federal member, and my heart breaks with every update. Like many Australians I was moved to tears when I heard that Ms Haines had lost her leg as a consequence of this crime. I spent a year living in Wangaratta in the 1980s. I worked on commercial radio as a 19-year-old. It is a wonderful town. I have been back there a number of times since, and not much has changed. There is no place in Australia for this sort of behaviour, but I certainly would not have picked Wangaratta as the place that it would occur.

The Prime Minister detailed this morning that the alleged perpetrator did a clear U-turn and then very deliberately drove his four-wheel drive, allegedly, into Ms Haines. I understand that the alleged perpetrator was known to police. I understand based on media reports that he was not interviewed last night because he was still under the influence of alcohol and/or drugs. I understand that this person was quite politically engaged. The Prime Minister and the Chief Minister, in their public comments, have spoken about the deterioration in political discourse in recent years, and they would be right.

We were discussing this as a group earlier before the sitting started, and I think that the COVID lockdowns were the catalyst—the lockdowns and the back scene mandates. More than any other event in my time on this planet, that was the moment that created dozens of conspiracy theories overnight and an army of individuals who questioned every single thing that governments did and assumed that there was a hidden agenda behind everything. This group of people has managed to change the way that we communicate about this stuff. So much of what they do is online, and, yes, it is fuelled by social media algorithms that give enormous traction to the content that shocks and angers. It pushes some online groups into a frenzy of rage. I would note that Wangaratta is less than an hour's drive from Porepunkah, which was the home of Dezi Freeman, but don't go thinking that this malaise is restricted to the far right because it is definitely present amongst the far left as well, much of the anger focused on some international issues. We are, generally speaking, seeing a loss of tolerance for alternative views and a loss of humanity, and I just do not understand how we got here, but when I look across the ocean at the leader of the free world I guess we should not be surprised.

I know we are still to learn a lot from the authorities about the incident in Wangaratta yesterday, and it is very, very easy for us to jump to conclusions. To some extent I have jumped to a series of conclusions in this response. But we are not the United States. This is Australia. There is much more that unites us than divides us. My call this afternoon is for kindness and calm. Politics will always involve engaging with people who we do not agree with, and we should continue to do that, but we need to understand and respect those who disagree with us. We certainly wish a speedy recovery for the member for Indi.

Dr Helen Haines MP—attack

MR EMERSON (Kurrajong) (5.35): I rise to reflect on yesterday's sickening attack on

the member for Indi Helen Haines. To Helen, her family and friends, her team and every person in Indi who has been served by her, we are all behind you and send you our love and strength. Dr Haines is a beacon of the independent movement. More than that, she represents the absolute best of politics and what we should all strive to be—an incredibly inspiring example of integrity first, intelligent, community-driven representation, of leading with love, compassion and respect. She is a beacon of hope for what politics could be if we all worked harder to make it what it should be.

What happened to Helen Haines yesterday is unfathomable. What happened to her is brutal, senseless and deeply disturbing. Too many women in public life live with threats and abuse as part of the job, and too many wonder whether the cost is worth it. Australia is poorer for every woman who decides it is not. While we do not yet know the modus of the attack, what we do know that the political polarisation is growing across our country. Personal attacks on elected representatives have become completely normalised, not just from punters but from other elected representatives. We cannot allow this horrific attack to be the beginning of a new chapter in which violence is normalised in our country too.

But for as long as powerful voices and the algorithms that enhance them seek to divide us, that unacceptable outcome will become increasingly likely. That is not the Australia that we know, and it is not the Australia that we want, but it is the Australia we choose every time we allow ourselves to be part of the problem. While there are lots of forces at play here and there is plenty of blame to share around—media, social media, populism, hateful us-versus-them narratives—we also need to accept that this is all of our problem and that we as elected representatives have to do better, that every time we prioritise populist rhetoric ahead of pushing for good policy we are feeding the beast that is tearing at the fabric of our society.

We need to acknowledge that we fuel the algorithms that thrive on division by framing our political opponents as reprehensible and that every time we let our disagreements devolve into denigration of those with whom we disagree we tell our communities it is okay to do the same. Our country needs leadership, and it needs leadership from us, from the people who have been elected to show leadership. This is not intended as apologia for what happened to Helen Haines yesterday. The only person responsible for her serious injuries is the weak, disturbed man who was behind the wheel and decided to harm her. It is intended as a call to action for us all to follow the lead of the woman he attacked, for us all to show the best of politics and to be more like Helen Haines.

Canberra—safety

MR CAIN (Ginninderra) (5.38): I rise to give a speech on behalf of Mr Barney Harriott, a year 10 student from Namadgi School in Kambah who spent some time with me back in August. It is hard to fit in all of my speeches. He was a delight to have in my office during that week. These are the words of Barney Harriott:

I ask this Assembly to focus on a fundamental responsibility of government and a right that should be afforded to every Canberran: the right to feel safe in our homes, on our streets, at work, and within our public spaces.

As a young Canberran, I have been fortunate to grow up in a city that has always felt safe, welcoming, and community minded. Growing up here, I rarely thought

twice about visiting local shops, catching public transport, attending community events, or spending time with friends around Canberra. That sense of safety is one of the things I value most about our city, and it is something worth protecting.

However, in recent years, I have noticed more and more conversations about safety within our community. Friends have told me they feel less comfortable waiting for public transport after dark. Family members have spoken about anti-social behaviour in public spaces. Community members have raised concerns about dangerous driving and the condition of local infrastructure. While these experiences may differ, they all point to the same issue: people want to feel confident and secure in the city they call home.

As someone who regularly uses our public transport network, visits our town centres, and spends time in our public spaces, I understand why these concerns matter. Like many people my age, I want to be able to go about everyday life confidently and safely. Those conversations are what prompted me to raise this matter before the Assembly today.

Canberra is widely recognised as one of the world's most liveable cities. As our Territory continues to grow, so too do the challenges associated with maintaining community safety. These challenges can arise across suburbs, town centres, public spaces, and transport corridors.

Public safety does not occur by chance. It is built through deliberate investment in frontline services, smart urban planning, strong community partnerships, and effective early intervention programs.

First, we must ensure our frontline services are properly supported. ACT Policing, ACT Fire & Rescue, the ACT Ambulance Service, the ACT State Emergency Service, and our emergency service volunteers perform extraordinary work every day to keep Canberrans safe. Whether responding to crime, medical emergencies, fires, storms, road trauma, or natural disasters, these dedicated personnel are often called upon during people's most difficult moments. Their effectiveness depends on having adequate staffing, resources, equipment, training, and support. Canberrans deserve well-resourced emergency services capable of meeting the demands of a growing Territory.

Second, safety must extend beyond emergency response and into the design and maintenance of our public spaces. Dangerous driving, reckless behaviour, and hooning continue to present risks on major roads and within residential neighbourhoods.

Road safety infrastructure must also be maintained to a high standard. Many Canberrans have raised concerns about the visibility of road markings during wet weather, particularly at night, when lane markings can become difficult to distinguish. Investing in clearer, more reflective line markings and ongoing maintenance would improve safety for motorists and help reduce the risk of accidents during adverse conditions.

Similarly, broken streetlights and damaged pathway lighting should be repaired as quickly as possible. Well-lit streets, paths, and public areas are essential for both actual and perceived safety. Delays in repairing lighting infrastructure can leave residents feeling vulnerable, particularly those walking, cycling, or using public transport after dark.

Third, we cannot discuss public safety without acknowledging the devastating impact of domestic, family, and sexual violence. These issues continue to affect individuals and families across the ACT. A comprehensive response requires sustained investment in crisis accommodation, emergency housing, legal and counselling services, victim support programs, and initiatives that hold perpetrators accountable. Equally important is education that promotes respectful relationships and helps prevent violence before it occurs.

(Extension of time granted.)

Fourth, long-term community safety requires investment in our young people. Youth engagement programs, sporting clubs, mentoring initiatives, recreational opportunities, and early intervention services provide positive pathways for young Canberrans. When young people feel connected to their community, supported by positive role models, and given opportunities to succeed, they are more likely to make positive contributions to society and less likely to become involved in harmful behaviours.

Mr Speaker, public safety is not simply about reducing crime statistics. It is about building community confidence. It is about ensuring that parents feel comfortable allowing their children to walk to school, that workers can travel home safely at night, that businesses can operate with confidence, and that vulnerable members of our community feel protected and supported.

For me, this debate is ultimately about preserving the Canberra that I and so many others value. Canberra has given me opportunities, friendships, and a strong sense of belonging. I want future generations of young Canberrans to enjoy that same experience. Whether it is a student travelling home after sport, a worker catching public transport late at night, a family walking through their local town centre, or an older resident enjoying our public spaces, everyone deserves to feel safe.

By investing in frontline services, safer public spaces, support for victims of violence, and opportunities for young people, we can continue building a Territory that is not only liveable, but safe, secure, and welcoming for all. Thank you.

Those were the words of Mr Barney Harriott, a year 10 student who did a week's work experience with me.

Legislation—Gambling and Racing Control (Code of Practice) Amendment Regulation 2026 (No 1)

MS VASSAROTTI (Kurrajong) (5.45): I rise to speak in response to the Gambling and Racing Control (Code of Practice) Amendment Regulation 2026 (No 1), which the minister tabled this afternoon as part of the presentation of papers. This regulation extends the mandatory shutdown period for poker machines. Shutting down poker machines for longer periods is a good thing to do, as we know that reducing their operating hours reduces harm. This is particularly so if machines are shut down late at night, when the worst harm occurs. Currently, poker machines in the ACT are only required to be shut down between 4 am and 9 am daily.

There is a problem with the regulation tabled today by the minister, however. It does not extend the shutdown period for long enough. It allows pokies to keep operating in the most harmful times of the early hours of the morning, particularly on weekends.

The evidence is clear that this will create harm.

There is another important context to this regulation; that is, the regulation represents a broken commitment. It proposes to implement a shutdown period that is shorter than was originally promised by the government. It is shorter than the commitment made publicly by the Chief Minister in 2024. Naturally, this is very concerning. It is also somewhat mystifying.

I can tell the Assembly that, for gambling harm reduction advocates who are watching and expecting the government to follow through on this promise, it was deeply concerning. The public commitment made by the government—in fact, announced by the Chief Minister—was very clear: the pokie shutdown period would be between 2 am and 10 am daily. Instead, the minister has tabled a regulation that has a shutdown period which is reduced on weekends, and which includes an additional six hours a week where pokies will remain in operation late into the night.

What is the result of this backdown in pokie operating hours? The clear answer is that there will be more harm in the community than under the original proposal. The government's tabled regulation is out of step with the evidence and out of step with the position of harm reduction advocates.

A question that arises from the tabled regulation is: why did the government water down the original commitment to shut off pokies? I asked the minister whether gambling venues or their representatives had lobbied her or other ministers to water down the original commitment. She answered, "No." So why is this happening? The minister responded that it was because of the night-time economy.

I appreciate that the minister was honest about what the government had done here. It decided to trade away a reduction in community harm in exchange for purported night-time economy outcomes. But it does not really accord with the principle asserted by the government in terms of putting the community first.

In that context, I give notice to the Assembly that the Greens will move to amend this regulation. The amendment is simple. It reinstates the government's original commitment, as announced by the Chief Minister, to require poker machines to shut down between 2 am and 10 am each day, and start the instrument from March 2027.

I would note that gambling advocates were actually suggesting that this should go further, but this was something that we agreed to in 2024, and I am hopeful that we can agree to this again in 2026. This would see a better outcome, and it would reduce the harm that is most concentrated in these most risky hours. Supporting the reduction in pokies' operating hours is a simple and effective way to reduce this harm, and I look forward to debating the amendment in the near future.

Yerrabi—community events

MR BRADDOCK (Yerrabi) (5.49): I want to report back on some events that I attended during the break between the two sitting periods. The first was the Lake Moon Festival. Chinese mid-autumn traditions were central to this particular festival. They had cultural performances, traditional games, workshops, Hanfu characters,

interactive quests, lantern rivers, food and a fish lantern parade. This was an awful lot of fun, and I thank them for inviting me to come along.

A major feature was the community cultural village, which brought together local schools, cultural associations and community organisations from a range of different cultural backgrounds. They provided hands-on workshops, games, art, traditional clothing and cultural displays to allow visitors to experience a true cultural immersion across a variety of different experiences.

The organisers' hope for the Lake Moon Festival is for it to be more than a celebration of one culture. By using a mid-autumn festival as a starting point, they created a welcoming space, where Canberra's diverse communities could meet, share their traditions, and discover one another's cultures and celebrate together.

Events such as these create meaningful recognition of the cultural diversity, community participation and connections that make Canberra such a great place to live. I would like to congratulate Joanna Zhang and everyone at the Asia-Australia Youth Association on all their hard work in making this festival such a successful one.

I have an admission to make. I did not get into the Scouts as a child, and that is something I now look back on with regret. I was glad to have the opportunity to join the ACT Scouts Cuboree at Camp Cottermouth. This is the peak event for Cub Scouts who are aged between eight and 11 years old in the ACT, as well as many visitors from New South Wales. They had over 1,200 participants onsite, which is a major logistical and coordination challenge, in the face of sometimes variable weather. Through a combination of over two years of preparation, improvisation and perseverance, they were able to make a truly successful event.

Cubs had the opportunity to engage in various activities across the ACT, including bushwalking, First Nations activities, drone flying, kayaking, abseiling, flying and robotics. I was able to have a tour of Camp Cottermouth and engage in a number of activities, including four-wheel drive recovery skills, archery and drones, and I really enjoyed that.

I would like to thank and congratulate Daniel Bartlett, the Deputy Chief Commissioner of Scouts ACT, and everyone involved in Scouts ACT for putting on such a fantastic event.

Youth—Raise Our Voice in Parliament

MS CHEYNE (Ginninderra—Manager of Government Business, Attorney-General, Minister for City and Government Services, and Minister for Transport) (5.51): I rise to speak the speech written by Rory, who is 14 and lives in the electorate of Fenner. Also, I thank Ashleigh Streeter-Jones for her commitment to the Raise Our Voice initiative, particularly the Raise our Voice in Parliament initiative. It is great to see it being expanded year on year. Here are Rory's words:

The issue I would like to bring to attention is owning your media.

We live in a shifting media landscape, as streaming has become the norm for consuming media.

Streaming is flawed, anything can be taken off, so you don't actually own your

movies or music, and there are so many streaming services out there that content is becoming increasingly fragmented.

DVDs and cds are the best way to own your media, but more and more companies are discontinuing them, making it harder to own your media.

Another topic similar to this is games as a service, many video games these days are online, and if they shutdown, you can't play them anymore, no matter if you paid or not, this is a consumer rights violation.

Not to mention PlayStation is discontinuing physical disc production in 2028, making it harder for us to actually own our games.

I want the government to ensure that everyone is able to actually own the things they pay for, and make it mandatory that there is a buy once, keep forever option for anything. Thank you.

I wish to comment on Rory's speech and what attracted me to it. Mr Speaker, you noticed my smile during the speech. The primary reason I was so attracted to it is that Rory and I, at the same age, encountered a fundamental shift in the relationship between consumers, technology and powerful corporations. When I was 14—I am getting on now; I turned 40 this year—we were discovering the incredible freedom that the internet could give us. It is almost twenty-six years later, and here is another 14-year-old asking why we have allowed some of that freedom to be taken away.

My generation was excited about everything that technology would allow us to do. Rory's generation is asking important questions about what technology should be allowed to stop us doing. In case people were not there in the early 2000s, it was a time of extraordinary transition. With Napster, LimeWire and burnt CDs, music was escaping the control of record companies. While being able to record radio onto tape had been commonplace for a long period of time, suddenly there was a new way to share music. Then there were CDs, DVDs and video stores, and there was a real question about whether Blu-ray was going to win over the other one—the other one lost—but it was exciting. There was the arrival of the iPod and no longer having to carry around your Walkman or your Discman, and no longer having to hear your disc jump, because it was not really a very useful piece of technology. And then there was the arrival of digital music stores and the idea of streaming. The idea of streaming, even 15 years ago, was so unusual—that you could pick whatever and it would appear on the screen. Now it is what we have, but it is not something that we can necessarily hold onto, as Rory has rightly pointed out.

I found it so compelling to read Rory's experience, and I reflected on how, at 14, I was experiencing the promise of what that technology could do. Today, 14-year-old Rory is asking us to account for the outcome of that technology and, in all reality, the reckoning of it.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

The Assembly adjourned at 5.56 pm.

Schedule of Amendment

Schedule 1

Better Regulation Legislation Amendment Bill 2026

Amendment moved by the Minister for City and Government Services

1

Clause 2 (2)

Page 2, line 9—

omit clause 2 (2), substitute

(2) The following provisions commence 6 months after this Act's notification day:

- section 4
 - part 7
 - parts 11 to 16
 - parts 20 to 23.
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