



DEBATES
OF THE
LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
FOR THE
AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

DAILY HANSARD

Edited proof transcript

21 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**.

Wednesday, 21 October 2026

Data centres—ACT Data Centre Framework (Ministerial statement)	3389
Building and construction—modern construction methods (Ministerial statement)	3394
Children and young people—out-of-home care (Ministerial statement).....	3397
Thriving Kids—update (Ministerial statement).....	3401
Planning—Manuka Hotel site—order to table documents	3410
Legal Affairs—Standing Committee	3417
Economics, Industry and Recreation—Standing Committee	3417
Social Policy—Standing Committee	3418
Holidays (Anzac Day) Amendment Bill 2026.....	3418
Planning (Missing Middle Housing) Amendment Bill 2026.....	3420

Questions without notice:

ACT public service—employee found to have engaged in serious corrupt conduct.....	3424
Suburban Land Agency—land release program.....	3425
Legal actions against the Integrity Commission—taxpayer funded legal fees	3426
Extreme weather—heat and smoke refuges	3426
Public schools—funding.....	3427
Public schools—funding.....	3429
Commonwealth—Disaster Ready Fund	3431
Energy—Energy Efficiency Council ACT scorecard	3431
Access Canberra—Woden—relocation.....	3433
ACT Health—paediatric services	3433
Extreme weather events—domestic, family and sexual violence	3434
Crime—offences against the person.....	3435
Firearms—legislation	3437
Extreme weather events—impacts on renters	3438
Drugs—roadside testing	3439
ACT Mental Health Month.....	3439
Justice—parole	3441

Supplementary answers to questions without notice:

Drugs—roadside testing	3442
Crime—offences against the person.....	3443
Public schools—funding.....	3443

Crime—offences against the person.....	3443
ACT public service—employee found to have engaged in serious corrupt conduct.....	3443
Crimes (Anti-Consorting) Amendment Bill 2026	3444
Government Agencies (Campaign Advertising) Amendment Bill 2025	3446
Domestic, family and sexual violence sector—system mapping.....	3453
Legislative Assembly—Standing order 118AA	3471
Statements by members:	
Disability support services—SeeWay program.....	3472
Government Agencies (Campaign Advertising) Amendment Bill 2025.....	3472
Adjournment:	
Women—violence against women.....	3473
Youth—careers.....	3474
Youth—Raise Our Voice in Parliament	3475
Youth—Raise Our Voice in Parliament	3476
Youth—Raise Our Voice in Parliament	3476
Youth—Raise Our Voice in Parliament	3477
Standing orders—suspension	3479
Women’s health—ovarian cancer	3480
Youth—Raise Our Voice in Parliament	3481
Youth—Raise Our Voice in Parliament	3481
Active travel	3482
Youth—Raise Our Voice in Parliament	3483
Schedule of amendments: Government Agencies (Campaign Advertising)	
Amendment Bill 2025	3484

Wednesday, 21 October 2026

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

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

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

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

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

Data centres—ACT Data Centre Framework Ministerial statement

MR BARR (Kurrajong—Chief Minister, Minister for Trade, Investment and the Knowledge Economy, Minister for Tourism and Events, and Minister for Major Projects) (10.01): Data centres are critical infrastructure that power the digital economy. Essentially, every application, online government service, cybersecurity operation and cloud-based business relies on secure digital infrastructure. As the demand for AI continues to increase, so too will demand for data centre capacity.

The ACT is already a nationally significant location for data centres, reflecting our role as the seat of the Australian government and a centre for secure digital services, cybersecurity and a wide range of defence-related activities. Facilities support critical government systems, sovereign capability and secure cloud services used across Australia and can continue to help attract high-value economic activity and provide the infrastructure necessary for Australian organisations to adopt AI and other advanced digital technologies.

The ACT government recognises that data centres present an important policy challenge that must be addressed carefully and transparently. Data centres, of course, require land, electricity, water and supporting infrastructure. They place demands on energy networks and utility systems. In a small jurisdiction such as ours, where industrial land is limited and infrastructure capacity must support a wide range of community needs, it is essential that future development occurs in a way that protects the long-term interests of Canberrans. Whilst we warmly welcome the national standards that were agreed through national cabinet earlier in the year, further work is required to reflect the territory's unique circumstances. For this reason, I have announced the development of the ACT Data Centre Framework.

The framework will provide a clear, consistent and transparent approach to assessing future data centre proposals in the territory. It will help industry to understand the government's expectations while assuring the community that proposals will be

considered against broader public interest considerations. It will establish clear expectations about where data centres should be located, the standards they must meet and how proposals will be assessed. It will support a whole-of-government approach that considers economic benefits alongside impacts on energy systems, water security, strategic land use, environmental outcomes and community wellbeing.

Development needs to occur in the right places. Data centres cannot be built in Canberra's residential neighbourhoods and are restricted to designated commercial, industrial, transport and services zones, and certain non-urban zones. It is our intention to explore opportunities to co-locate future facilities with renewable energy and battery storage infrastructure. This reflects the need to optimise land use in the territory, without compromising Canberra's community, recreation and housing needs.

Data centres will be required to help build new renewable energy generation, not simply consume existing capacity. Unfettered growth of data centres would pose a risk to the ACT's electricity network that we cannot accept. Reflecting our position as a national leader on climate action, every major proposal will need to demonstrate how it strengthens Canberra's energy system and contributes to the clean energy transition.

The ACT is significantly advanced on national standards relating to water use. Modern facilities operating in the ACT already use technologies that significantly reduce water consumption, such as closed-loop systems, but more can be done to cement ambitious standards. Any future centre in the ACT will be expected to demonstrate best practice water efficiency and minimise impacts both on water supply and wastewater infrastructure. This will help safeguard our supply of water for current and future generations.

Notably, the framework is not intended to prevent appropriate investment. Rather, it is intended to ensure that future investment contributes positively to Canberra's economic, environmental and social objectives. That means expecting best practice environmental performance, world-class energy efficiency and responsible water use, all while ensuring that local communities benefit from future investment.

The ACT government's approach is one of balance, and it will not be done in isolation. Engagement with key stakeholders has already commenced and will continue throughout the development of the framework. To balance competing interests and promote community outcomes, we need to deepen our understanding of how data centres can and should interact with utilities and regulators, support cybersecurity, research and defence, and avoid or minimise impact on our environment. An effective framework will seek to reflect lived experiences, lessons learned nationally and internationally, and the best available knowledge. We will also strive to promote innovative solutions that establish the territory as a national benchmark for how digital infrastructure should be developed.

Whilst the framework is being developed, we will aim to appropriately manage proposals already in the pipeline. Any interim measures would be to protect our essential infrastructure, environment and community until the broader framework is established. This will ensure we have the additional controls required to manage known climate, energy, water, environmental and land use risks associated with existing and planned data centres. These actions are expected to be reaffirmed and strengthened

through the development and delivery of the framework.

We are ambitious about the opportunities created by AI and data centres, and we are confident in Canberra's capacity to contribute to the nation's digital future. But we are equally determined to ensure that any growth occurs responsibly, sustainably and in a manner that protects the interests of the community. With strong governance, with clear planning rules, with responsible infrastructure investment and with a commitment to innovation, the ACT can demonstrate how digital infrastructure and AI can be developed in a way that delivers lasting benefits for current and future generations.

I present the following paper:

Data centre—Ministerial statement, 21 October 2026.

I move:

That the Assembly take note of the paper.

MISS NUTTALL (Brindabella) (10.07): The ACT Greens welcome the government acknowledging that the rapid growth of data centres presents significant challenges for our energy system, water resources, land use and climate goals. Data centres are becoming an increasingly important part of Australia's digital infrastructure, but their growth cannot come at the expense of Canberra's communities, environment or climate commitments.

We support the principle that data centres should be assessed against clear public interest criteria and be required to contribute positively to the territory. Artificial intelligence and digital technologies will play an important role in Australia's future, but Canberra must avoid the mistakes seen elsewhere, where poorly planned data centre growth has placed pressure on electricity networks, water supplies and local communities.

The ACT has an opportunity to establish a genuinely world-leading framework that puts climate action, environmental protection and community benefit at its core. While national standards are a useful starting point, Canberra should set a higher bar for data centre development. The Greens want to work constructively through the framework development process to ensure this happens.

The Greens support strong regulation of this sector. Data centres should not simply be permitted to consume large amounts of public infrastructure capacity while privatising the benefits. If these facilities are to expand in Canberra, they must demonstrate clear benefits to the community and operate to the highest environmental standards.

Now, I appreciate that Mr Barr sounds very reassuring in what he says the framework is going to do, but let's not forget, only 3½ weeks ago, about the things he and his government have voted against the Data Centre Framework containing, because if you read through the ministerial statement, it appears to be quite the contradiction with his voting record. In his ministerial statement he says:

It is essential that future development occurs in a way that protects the long-term

interests of Canberrans.

But this Labor government, and Mr Barr, is on the record voting against "... community concern about data centres and their impact on local environment and amenity". They voted against even acknowledging that the community is concerned about data centres.

In his ministerial statement he says:

Data centres will be required to help build new renewable energy, not simply consume existing capacity.

Yet, this Labor government, and Mr Barr, is on the record voting against including this in the framework: "... require data centres to buy or create 100 per cent renewable electricity to meet the additional demand required".

In his ministerial statement he says:

Any future centre in the ACT will be expected to demonstrate best practice water efficiency and minimise impacts both on water supply and wastewater infrastructure.

Yet, this Labor government, and Mr Barr, is on the record voting against including this in the framework: "... requires data centres to use closed loop water cooling and be sustainable on the ACT's limited water supply".

In his ministerial statement he says:

Engagement with key stakeholders has already commenced ...

But this Labor government and Mr Barr are on the record voting against ensuring adequate community consultation. I have not heard anything in this ministerial statement about where the community can input into this data framework. I am deeply concerned that the only people that the government is hearing from and listening to are the people who want to build more data centres.

In his ministerial statement the Chief Minister does not acknowledge First Nations traditional custodians at all, so I suppose this is consistent with this Labor government, and Mr Barr, on the record, voting against including in the framework: "... requires consultation with First Nations traditional custodians for any greenfield data centre development".

Community input and consultation are essential. It cannot be overstated. This ministerial statement says:

It is our intention to explore opportunities to co-locate future facilities with renewable energy and battery storage infrastructure.

While this is laudable, it is essential that this government does not bring in data centres by stealth. The community does have concerns about data centres, and the community needs to be given a real opportunity to be heard and listened to, and that should include an opportunity to input into this Data Centre Framework. I have not seen any point

where the community gets a say into what the Data Centre Framework contains. Why is it that the companies get consulted but the community does not? I am calling on the government to give the community an opportunity to have a say on this Data Centre Framework.

I will just say, as the Greens spokesperson for young people, we are hugely concerned about data centres. You need not look any further than the number of Raise Our Voice speeches spoken by parliamentarians into the *Hansard* just yesterday that expressed concern over AI and data centres. They draw attention to the way AI will undermine our learning, threaten our jobs, destroy our environment and draw our friends into AI psychosis. I figure that if Mr Barr uncritically presents the development of AI as a good thing, he will lose the ear of most of the young people he serves.

All this being the case, the government statement raises important questions and must be answered through the development of the framework. In particular, the Greens will be looking closely at how much additional electricity demand is expected from proposed data centres; whether requirements to deliver new renewable energy generation will be mandatory, enforceable and sufficient to avoid placing pressure on the ACT's clean energy transition; the impacts on water consumption and wastewater infrastructure, especially as climate change increases pressure on water security; whether scarce industrial land is being allocated properly, particularly when Canberra is facing competing demands for housing, community infrastructure and employable lands; and the extent to which local communities will have meaningful input into decision-making.

MS CARRICK (Murrumbidgee) (10.14): I welcome the Chief Minister's statement and the recognition that major infrastructure projects require careful planning and consideration of their impacts on communities. The challenge is not whether we support the energy transition or critical infrastructure; the challenge is ensuring these developments are located in the right places and assessed against the long-term interests of local communities.

This issue is particularly relevant for residents of Uriarra Village, who are currently expressing high levels of concern about a proposal for a large-scale battery energy storage facility nearby. When I say large, this is over half a kilometre long. While such projects may play an important role in our energy system, residents are entitled to ask whether the proposal is consistent with the area's rural character, environmental values and the long-term future of the Uriarra Village.

Communities need confidence that decisions are being made transparently, that planning principles are being applied consistently and that local voices are genuinely being heard. As we consider new infrastructure needs, we must ensure that growth and development do not come at the expense of the communities that already call these places home. The interests of current and future residents must remain at the centre of decision-making. That is the challenge before us, and it is one I know the people of Uriarra Village will expect the government to meet. I also support Miss Nuttall's call on ensuring that young people are heard in this debate.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Building and construction—modern construction methods

Ministerial statement

MR STEEL (Murrumbidgee—Treasurer, Minister for Planning and Sustainable Development, Minister for Heritage, and Minister for Sport and Recreation) (10.16): I am pleased to update the Assembly on work underway to support modern methods of construction as part of broader efforts to improve construction productivity and support the delivery of more homes for Canberrans.

Last Friday, commonwealth, state and territory ministers responsible for housing, homelessness, planning and building met for the second Joint Ministerial Meeting on Housing Supply and Affordability. Ministers discussed current housing market conditions and reaffirmed their commitment to tackling housing affordability and cost-of-living pressures by accelerating reforms that lift productivity and deliver more homes more quickly.

With construction productivity stagnant for 30 years, modern methods of construction have the potential to drive housing productivity in Australia. Representatives from investors, modular housing manufacturers, unions and construction companies met with ministers to discuss how to improve the uptake of modern methods of construction. Approaches such as prefabricated, modular and other offsite manufacturing methods, which move more construction into manufacturing environments, can reduce construction timeframes, improve quality assurance and support innovation across the building and construction sector. These are not intended as a complete replacement for traditional building methods but as a way to complement existing construction practices to get homes built faster without compromising on quality or liveability.

Prefabrication and modular construction are already prevalent in parts of the construction market, such as temporary medical facilities, additions to our existing school sites and bespoke housing projects. It has been great to visit some of the ACT-based businesses participate in this sector and supply into these markets. There is a real opportunity in front of us to broaden this reach into mainstream housing construction if we can overcome some of the current challenges facing the wider adoption of modern methods of construction in Australia's housing delivery system.

One of the key recognised challenges is the fragmented nature of regulation, certification, procurement and approval processes across jurisdictions. For manufacturers and builders operating across state and territory borders, inconsistent requirements can create unnecessary costs, duplication and uncertainty. For smaller jurisdictions like the ACT, it can limit access to larger markets and the ability to operate across borders, which in turn limits the ability to benefit from the economies of scale needed to support investment in local manufacturing activities, let alone innovative construction technologies. There are also the practical barriers faced by industry, including access to finance, the movement of prefabricated modules through urban environments, procurement settings and the need for greater certainty of housing demand. A sustainable sector depends on manufacturers having confidence in future project pipelines and repeatable delivery opportunities before investing in manufacturing facilities, technology and workforce capability.

Work is already underway to address these challenges through the National

Competition Policy through reforms to the planning and building system. These reforms focus on ensuring that innovative construction methods are assessed fairly and appropriately within existing regulatory frameworks and, importantly, seek to promote regulatory neutrality. This means that prefabricated and modular building systems would not face additional barriers simply because they differ from traditional construction approaches, and instead building systems would be assessed on their ability to meet the required safety, performance and consumer protection outcomes.

All jurisdictions are also supporting work being undertaken by the Australian Building Codes Board to develop a nationally consistent definition for modern methods of construction under the National Construction Code and a national voluntary certification scheme for manufacturers of prefabricated and modular construction systems. The ACT is also participating in national efforts to increase the scale and capability of Australia's prefabrication and modular construction sector through the national housing platform.

The ACT government is a proud supporter of a nationally consistent, open-source, kit-of-parts construction and technology system, which is being developed by the Building 4.0 Cooperative Research Centre, known as the CRC, to boost housing supply and support innovation in the residential construction sector. Funded through a federation funding agreement with seven Australian governments and delivered by CRC 4.0 in partnership with industry, the platform is exploring ways to better align housing demand, housing design and manufacturing capability across Australia.

Kit of parts is a modular construction method. Standardised, interchangeable components are manufactured offsite in a dispersed supply chain factory setting, ensuring high-quality design and production is not impacted by site delays, such as poor weather, access issues or delayed preparations. Once on the building site, the components can be assembled faster than traditional construction. Kit of parts can enable faster construction. The economic rationale centres on achieving manufacturing-scale economies through repeatability. While individual buildings remain bespoke, the commonality of the underlying components achieves greater scale across multiple projects.

To compare this to other modern methods of construction, other related construction types include modular construction, which is where flat panels or 3D modules are manufactured and transported to site—typically, a single manufacturer is involved—and kit homes, where there are standardised components from a manufacturer's proprietary system constructed in a kit for a specific home design, similar to a Lego set for a specific building but on a much larger scale. In contrast, kit-of-parts buildings can be constructed in different configurations, combining parts from different manufacturers. This offers a high degree of customisation for buyers while maintaining standardisation for manufacturers in producing products, which supports larger scales of production.

In addition to the significant reform and development work underway, it was really pleasing that at Friday's meeting of ministers and industry we agreed to strengthen collaboration to encourage investment and productivity through the building of homes using innovative approaches. A more coordinated national approach can help provide greater certainty of demand, support investment in manufacturing facilities and build

the industry capability necessary to scale up production over time. Governments can also help establish conditions needed for success by improving pipeline visibility, reducing unnecessary barriers and supporting nationally coordinated reform.

However, long-term growth of this sector will also depend on private sector leadership, investment in manufacturing capability, workforce development and resilient supply chains. The ACT government is pleased to see growing momentum across governments, industry and investors to realise the benefits of these approaches, as we see the increasingly important role that modern methods of construction can play in improving construction productivity and supporting our city's housing needs.

We will continue to work with the commonwealth and our state and territory counterparts and industry to support practical reforms that encourage innovation, boost productivity, support the conditions necessary for a scalable and commercially sustainable modern methods of construction sector whilst ensuring that standards of quality, safety and consumer protection apply. I look forward to keeping the Assembly updated.

I present the following paper:

Modern Methods of Construction—Ministerial statement, 21 October 2026.

I move:

That the Assembly take note of the paper.

MS CLAY (Ginninderra) (10.24): It was really good to hear that update from the minister. I think it is great to see that ACT Labor is moving forwards in different construction methods, which may actually solve some of the problems we are facing. It is really, really good to see.

The ACT Greens actually took a policy on prefab housing to the 2024 election. It was part of our policy to massively upscale our public housing pipeline and our public housing stock, and we saw it as a really, really good way to make sure that we could deliver public homes and do so much more quickly than we are seeing roll out on the ground. Unfortunately, we were not able to reach agreement with our colleagues, and you can see that reflected in the 2024 supply and confidence agreement—that is not there anymore. We were not even able to get an “explore prefabricated housing” statement in there. It was just something that government was not receptive to at the time. We were aware that the former minister was looking at prefabricated housing, but clearly she was simply not prepared to make any positive statements or make any kind of “explore this” type of commitment. It is really, really good to see that ACT Labor has moved along in the last two years and is now actively looking at this.

It would be great to get some more information from the minister at some stage. It would be great to hear what the reduction in likely construction timelines would be. We have heard it will give us much quicker construction times. We have heard concerns that it may lead to higher costs, and of course one of the ways to manage that would be for government to be a lot more proactive in development. Government could become a public housing developer, as was recommended by the Greens and as we took to the

electorate, and government could actually play a role in at-scale development and at-scale purchasing, and that might be one way to manage that issue. It would also be really good to hear how much government is planning on using prefabricated and modular housing directly in our public housing and how much they expect this to become standard for the ACT. I think these are all really, really positive directions.

We are very aware that our neighbours next door in New South Wales are much further ahead in this space. When we took our 2024 election policy to the election, Queensland was leading the charge. That is partly where we drew our inspiration. New South Wales has moved along at pace now. I understand they have integrated prefabricated buildings into their law and integrated modern methods of construction directly into their mainstream building approvals now. It is good to see that the ACT government is now looking at this.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Children and young people—out-of-home care

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) (10.24): Today I will be tabling the latest *Out of Home Care Snapshot Report*. This report provides an important account of the children and young people involved in the ACT's out-of-home care system, the types of care and support they receive and the progress being made under Next Steps for Our Kids. This report demonstrates encouraging progress but also shows where further work is required.

Each number in this report represents a child or young person, their family, their relationships and their journey through the child protection system. I acknowledge the children and young people whose experiences are reflected in this report. I also acknowledge their families and carers, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and organisations, community service providers and the staff who work every day to support children and young people across the ACT. We must therefore interpret the data carefully, while never losing sight of the individual lives behind it.

The latest data contains encouraging signs. Between 1 July and 31 December 2025, 59 children and young people entered out-of-home care. This is a reduction from 71 children and young people during the same period in the previous year, a decrease of 17 per cent. The number of children and young people returning to out-of-home care also decreased. During the reporting period 25 children and young people returned to care, compared with 33 during the same period in the previous year, a reduction of 24 per cent.

Where it is safe and in the best interests of the child, restoration to their family remains our first priority. At 31 December 2025, 726 children and young people were living in out-of-home care, compared with 739 at the same point in the previous year. Taken together, the reduction in entries and re-entries provides some encouraging signs and may indicate that earlier support and intervention is helping, enabling families to remain safely together. When children and young people leave care, the arrangements

supporting them are becoming more sustainable.

However, these results must be considered over time. A reduction across one reporting period does not by itself establish a permanent trend, but we are seeing continued and sustained change. We will continue to monitor this data carefully to understand what further action may be needed. This will be considered as part of the development of the Next Steps for Our kids second action plan.

There has also been positive movement in permanency for children. At 31 December, 11 enduring parental responsibility orders and adoption orders have been finalised for children in out-of-home care, compared with nine at the same point in the previous year. I want to note that permanency is much more than the legal status of a placement. When restoration is not possible, we work to ensure that children and young people have stable, nurturing and lasting care arrangements that meet their individual needs. It is about providing children and young people with enduring relationships, stability, security and a genuine sense of belonging.

The snapshot report also identifies areas where challenges remain. The government is focused on strengthening placement stability, increasing the availability of suitable family-based care and improving the support available to carers and families. This includes continuing to prioritise kinship care, where children and young people can safely remain connected to family, community, identity and culture. We also continue to place emphasis on the supports available to foster and kinship carers, with the practical, therapeutic and professional assistance they need to provide stable care.

The data also reflects an ongoing need for residential care. Residential care has an important role for some children and young people with complex needs, particularly where a family-based placement is not immediately available or appropriate. However, it should not become the default response simply because a suitable family-based placement cannot be found. Children and young people should be supported in the most family-like environment that can safely meet their needs. Placement stability matters. For this reason, the government will continue to focus on preventing avoidable placement breakdowns and ensuring that care arrangements respond to the individual needs and circumstances of each child and young person.

The snapshot report again highlights the unacceptable over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people in out-of-home care. Between 1 July and 31 December 2025, 23 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people entered care, compared with 26 during the same period in the previous year. While this is a reduction, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people continue to make up a disproportionate share of those entering and living in out-of-home care.

This cannot be understood or addressed in isolation from the broader effects of intergenerational trauma, systemic disadvantage and the continuing impacts of past policies and practices, nor can government determine the solutions alone. We know it requires culturally safe, early support for families, stronger community-controlled responses and decision-making that recognises the importance of family, kin, culture and country. Where an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander child cannot safely remain at home, every effort is made to preserve those connections and to apply the Aboriginal

and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle in a meaningful way.

The government's work in this area is aligned with Closing the Gap target 12, which seeks to reduce the rate of over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in out-of-home care by 45 per cent by 2031. Reducing over-representation requires genuine partnership and shared decision-making with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, families, communities and organisations. We continue our commitment to addressing the recommendations of the *Our Booris, Our Way* report. These recommendations provide us with the framework we need to make sustained changes.

Central to Next Steps for Our Kids is improving outcomes by supporting families earlier, providing more flexible and child-focused services and reducing avoidable demand for out-of-home care. Most importantly, it requires us to listen to children and young people and to take their views seriously. Their experiences and expertise must continue to inform how we understand the impact of reform and how we build a better child and family services system in the ACT.

The work underway to strengthen the monitoring, evaluation and learning approach for Next Steps also provides an opportunity to contemporise the snapshot report. This work will help strengthen how progress under Next Steps is measured, understood and reported and support reporting that is more meaningful, accessible and focused on outcomes. This will include working with key stakeholders and community, ensuring the views of people with lived and living experience continue to inform how we understand the impact of reform.

The ACT government will continue to build on what is working, examine where outcomes can be improved and remain accountable for the areas requiring further attention. Every child and young person deserves to be safe, strong and connected. They deserve stable and nurturing relationships, a meaningful voice in decisions about their lives and the opportunity to maintain their identity, family, community and cultural connections.

For children and young people who cannot safely remain at home, we must provide care that is not merely a placement but a foundation from which they can heal, grow and build their future. We will continue to use the evidence in this report to guide our decisions, strengthen accountability and improve outcomes for children, young people and families. I commend the *Out of Home Care Snapshot Report* to the Assembly.

I present a copy of the paper:

Out of Home Care Snapshot Report—

1 July 2017 – 31 December 2025, undated.

A presentation of data covering 1 July 2017 to 31 December 2025—Ministerial statement, 21 October 2026.

I move:

That the Assembly take note of the statement.

MISS NUTTALL (Brindabella) (10.36): I thank the minister for his statement on the *Out of Home Care Snapshot Report*, and I would be grateful to speak with him about the report, once we have read it in full. We all know that there is so much work to do here, and I want to do everything I can to support that work.

Although there may be positive stories in the data that the minister has shared today, I fear that there have been some critical pieces left out and which tell a fuller picture of the lived reality of children in our out of home care system—that is, approximately one in three young people leaving out of home care experience homelessness at some stage within the first year after leaving care.

This is national data. I would cite ACT-specific data, but the ACT government does not yet collect it in a centralised and consistent manner. I have raised this in this place many times, and my motion for a youth homelessness strategy specifically called on the government to act on our calls. We are yet to see any progress, and I would greatly appreciate an update from the minister on whether a co-design with young people with lived experience or the development of data collection systems have commenced.

The hardships of young people who experience homelessness within their first year of exiting the out of home care system—nearly one in three—are not captured in the reduced figures of young people who do not return to out of home care. In fact, there is so much which this figure does not capture. I recognise that the minister has acknowledged that it does not represent a complete reflection of our system and its shortfalls, but I want to emphasise this point, because we must all vehemently oppose any suggestion that things are where they should be, when it comes to systems of support for our children and young people.

This figure does not capture where these young people did not return to care because there was not a safe or suitable place for them in care. We must ask the question: did they instead wind up sleeping rough, working three jobs outside school to fast-track their independence because there was simply no other option for them to survive? This is a reality for so many—for too many.

I have learned this from talking to young people in our community who are generous enough to tell me their stories, despite having had to do so countless times over the course of their life, navigating systems which, too often, they found, worked against them, not with them. I have been lucky enough to speak to quite a few young people with lived experience of the out of home care system through the wonderful crew at CREATE. I believe the minister has also spoken to young people through CREATE. They were the creators of and contributors to the *Listen to me!* report. If anyone in this place has not read that report yet, I would seriously recommend that they do read it.

During estimates hearings, the ACT Official Visitors expressly confirmed that we have serious policy issues in both Housing ACT and Children, Youth and Families which are contributing to high rates of youth homelessness in Canberra. They said we must address the issue through both directorates. Again, this is something that was in our motion. It also called for key cohorts to be addressed—out of home care leavers and First Nations young people.

I want to acknowledge the minister's comments about the ongoing over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people in out of home care. While any reduction in the number of First Nations children entering care is welcome, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people do remain dramatically over-represented at every stage of the system.

Investing in the recommendations of the Our Booris, Our Way Review and the Our Booris, Our Way Implementation Oversight Committee must remain a government budget priority. I currently have a question on notice seeking clarity about how much new funding in the 2026-27 budget has actually been allocated to the committee and to services for children and young people. If we are serious about reducing over-representation, we must meaningfully invest in self-determination in Aboriginal community-controlled organisations and in the culturally safe supports that keep children connected to family, kin, culture and country.

Ultimately, that is why I am really cautious about looking at data in isolation, when it comes to young people in government care systems. A reduction in entries to care or a reduction in returns to care may be positive, but the true measure of success is not whether children and young people leave the care system at all; it is whether they leave with a stable and safe place to live that is right for them, whether they have strong relationships and cultural connections, and whether they have been supported to have real opportunities for a good life and a safety net in place to catch them if they fall.

We urge every single child or young person in care and every single young person leaving care to ask those questions and for there to be honesty about the answers. I thank the minister for the statement and look forward to reviewing the report in greater detail.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Thriving Kids—update Ministerial statement

MS ORR (Yerrabi—Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, Minister for Climate Change, Environment, Energy and Water, Minister for Disability, Autism and Neurodiversity, Minister for Housing and Homelessness, and Minister for Equality) (10.41): I am pleased to provide an update to the Assembly on the implementation of Thriving Kids in the ACT, which commenced on 1 October 2026.

In September 2026, I delivered a ministerial statement on the Thriving Kids implementation roadmap, fulfilling the ACT government's six-monthly reporting commitment to the Assembly arising from the Assembly resolution of 24 September 2025. That update outlined the planned approach to implementing Thriving Kids. Today's statement provides a further update on the commencement of Thriving Kids in the ACT on 1 October 2026.

Thriving Kids represents a significant step forward in how we support children and families in the ACT. It has been designed to provide earlier, more coordinated and more equitable access to support. This is an important step forward in ensuring children aged zero to eight and their families, carers and kin can access the right help at the right time.

The ACT government recognises that children thrive when families can access support early and when services work together around the needs of the child. Thriving Kids reflects this commitment through a family-centred, strengths-based approach that brings together expertise across health, education, community services and the disability sector.

This reform draws on insights from consultation, collaboration and co-design over recent years, both locally and nationally, and it has also been informed by the work of the inquiry into the Thriving Kids initiative and the Thriving Kids Advisory Group from September 2025, which brought together the expertise and lived experience of children, families, carers, service providers, advocates and experts from across Australia. This helped to shape the national model and domains of support for Thriving Kids.

Earlier this year, the ACT worked closely with the Australian government and other states and territories to finalise the national agreements that underpin Foundational Supports and Thriving Kids, helping to establish a nationally consistent approach while recognising the needs of local communities. Most importantly, while we need to be consistent with the national model, we have sought to ensure that the voices of ACT children, families and carers underpin the local design and implementation of Thriving Kids.

In March and April 2026, I led targeted engagement with service providers, parents, carers and kin to better understand their experiences, priorities and expectations for the reform. These conversations provided valuable insights into how Thriving Kids can best support children and families and directly informed implementation planning in the ACT. This work has been complemented by broader ACT government-funded community consultation led by National Disability Services ACT and the ACT Disability Directed Advocacy Caucus. These engagements have supported the initial phases of implementation and will continue to help inform future reforms, including general Foundational Supports and NDIS reforms for Canberrans and the Disability Royal Commission recommendations.

I am grateful to the many families, carers, advocates, community organisations and service providers who generously shared their expertise and lived experience through these processes. Their contributions have been instrumental in shaping the ACT's approach to implementation and the broader disability reform agenda.

Since the commencement of Thriving Kids on 1 October 2026, a number of important implementation milestones have been achieved, including:

Establishing navigation, intake and referral pathways through ACT child and family centres to provide information, advice and service navigation, helping children and families connect with the right supports earlier.

Launching a dedicated Thriving Kids phone line and online inquiry and referral pathways to support families, carers, practitioners and service providers seeking advice regarding developmental concerns, neurological developmental differences and available supports.

Updating ACT government websites and program information to provide

accessible resources on child development and Thriving Kids supports for families, carers, kin and professionals.

Continuing development of our ACT Thriving Kids service model, to determine the best way to deliver evidence-informed supports aligned with the national model and integrated with broader disability reforms.

Progressing recruitment to support the delivery of Thriving Kids targeted therapeutic supports, intake and navigation functions, and key implementation activities, including communications, consultation, clinical governance, and workforce development and training.

Releasing initial funding for targeted supports for priority cohorts, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and culturally and linguistically diverse children and their families, carers and kin.

Strengthening data collection and service monitoring and commencing scoping work to improve digital infrastructure to support service coordination, booking and waitlist management.

These achievements represent important early steps in building a more coordinated, connected and responsive support system for ACT children and families. Over the coming months, the ACT government will continue the next phase of Thriving Kids implementation as we work towards full rollout by 1 January 2028. This work will include ongoing engagement with children, families, carers, service providers and community stakeholders to ensure implementation continues to be informed by lived experience and community feedback.

Key priorities will include commissioning and procurement activities for the future parenting supports, peer supports and targeted services, including additional supports for children with autism. This will strengthen approaches to early identification and support for children with developmental delay and neurodivergence, as well as expanding access to low-cost assistive technology where it can support children's participation and development.

We will also continue to strengthen the foundations of the program through enhanced data collection, outcomes monitoring and continuous improvement processes, while progressing infrastructure and accommodation requirements to support service growth and future expansion. Together, these initiatives are establishing the foundations for a stronger and more connected system of support for ACT children and families.

The commencement of Thriving Kids is not the completion of reform; it is just the start. It marks the beginning of a long-term transformation in the way services are delivered and coordinated for children and families in the ACT. The ACT has intentionally adopted a continuous improvement approach to implementation of Thriving Kids, recognising that meaningful system reform requires ongoing review and refinement based on evidence, implementation experience and feedback from families and service providers. As implementation progresses, we will continue to learn about, adapt and strengthen supports to ensure the system responds to the needs of children and families.

I also wish to acknowledge that this work is occurring during a period of significant national reform, including changes to the National Disability Insurance Scheme and the

progressive development of Foundational Supports. I want to take a moment to acknowledge the significant and personal impact this has on people with disability and the disability community.

I also want to take the time to recognise publicly the contribution of families, carers, community organisations, clinicians and advocates who have helped to shape this reform—and will continue to do so. Their expertise continues to shape implementation and will remain central to the ongoing reforms.

I thank members of the Assembly for their strong interest in Thriving Kids and the broader disability reform. While there is more work ahead, the progress made since 1 October 2026 demonstrates our shared commitment to building a more responsive, equitable and sustainable system of support for ACT children and families. The ACT government remains committed to ensuring every child can thrive, participate fully in their community and reach their full potential.

I present the following paper:

Update on Implementation of Thriving Kids—Ministerial statement, 21 October 2026.

I move:

That the Assembly take note of the paper.

MISS NUTTALL (Brindabella) (10.49): I thank the minister for her statement. Thriving Kids has now commenced, and it appears that the only new, front-facing things that kids and their parents are able to access are a website and a phone line. These, of course, feed into existing ACT government services, but, from the minister's own admission, they are still developing the overarching service model.

I am glad to hear that the minister has acknowledged that the roadmap is a starting point, but it is important that we highlight some key things that the government has not yet worked out. In the roadmap, there is a section with the heading "ACT Workforce Strategy", and the corresponding action is, "Develop an ACT-specific workforce strategy that complements commonwealth initiatives." In other words, we do not have a workforce strategy for the ACT yet.

Her statement mentions "a family-centred, strengths-based approach that brings together expertise across health, education, community services and the disability sector". The challenges facing our public education system right now are well documented in this place, and I will not re-prosecute them right now. But I am concerned that we have yet to see a credible niche for Thriving Kids within education settings, especially given that the Thriving Kids program commenced three weeks ago. There is nothing here that dispels the growing community sentiment that the government is still building the plane as it is flying it.

We are particularly interested in what the minister means by "enhanced data collection" and we would really like to know what those initial data points are. If it were up to us, we would like to see the government track the public reporting of waiting times, the

number of children transitioning, service capacity and provider availability, children receiving no equivalent support elsewhere, family experience and outcomes, and escalation pathways for children with unmet needs.

We need the government to be specific about the data they are gathering, because we need to know whether Thriving Kids is actually just money that the federal government would have spent on the NDIS, cost-shifted to the territory. Of course, people will be asking this question, because the federal NDIS minister, Mark Butler, referred to Thriving Kids as “a more efficient way to spend taxpayers’ money”.

What we have been hearing from the community is that the people who think Thriving Kids will help often approach this from the early childhood development angle. Disability advocates are far more sceptical about the process, at least in part because it has been touted as a solution to the expanding NDIS. But Thriving Kids is being funded from the money we set aside for Foundational Supports, so it is being funded from the disability bucket of money. At a time when rampant NDIS cuts have already started slashing people’s social, community and civic participation support, there are real, palpable frustrations from people on the NDIS that the first foundational support cab off the rank—the first safety net—is restricted to children aged zero to eight.

The Greens have repeatedly made it clear that, despite our opposition to the NDIS cuts, we will do what we can to support the rollout of Thriving Kids in the ACT, simply because that is what people here are set to rely on. I am glad to hear the minister affirm the government’s commitment to ensuring Thriving Kids is responsive to community feedback, and I ask that this is done transparently, so that community can see that this is true. Whether that is through a listening report or some other way which clearly shows how the government has actively integrated the views of community in service design and rollout, I call on them to deliver on this.

I have attended community roundtables on what Foundational Supports should include, if it is really to work for people in the ACT and their needs, including those on Thriving Kids. Community does know what will work for them; they have so many of the answers.

The Greens will continue to engage constructively in the rollout of Thriving Kids, and we will continue to hold government accountable for delivering on its commitment and for the needs of the community.

MS CARRICK (Murrumbidgee) (10.53): I thank the minister for her update on the implementation of Thriving Kids. The objective of ensuring children receive support earlier, closer to where they live, learn and play, is one that I support. Families want timely help, not long waits and complex systems. However, what concerns me is the gap between the ambition of this reform and our readiness to deliver it.

The statement outlines consultation processes, phone lines, referral pathways and ongoing planning. It is more than a year after Thriving Kids was announced, and we are still hearing that the ACT service model is being developed, workforce recruitment is progressing and commissioning decisions are yet to occur.

Before we can successfully implement Thriving Kids, we need a clear understanding of

three things. First, what services will ACT children require under this new model? Second, what services do we currently have across government, community and private providers? Third, what workforce, infrastructure and funding gaps must be addressed to bridge the difference? Without that mapping, we risk creating a system that promises support but cannot deliver it when families need it.

Parents are interested in whether they can access a speech pathologist, occupational therapist, psychologist or developmental support in a reasonable timeframe. As we move towards the full implementation in 2028, I urge the government to provide greater transparency about demand forecasting, service capacity and workforce planning. Early intervention only works if the supports actually exist.

MR CAIN (Ginninderra) (10.55): As members would be aware, on 26 February this year, Minister Orr announced, with great fanfare, the bilateral agreement, with considerable publication, saying that the October commencement of Thriving Kids allowed time for consultation, planning and workforce preparation. They are noble aspirations, Mr Speaker, but what we are hearing today, and what I am hearing from the community, is that hardly anything has really happened.

On 27 May, there was another implementation update, and in September there was the roadmap, followed by the launch on 1 October. Today, with this statement and this opportunity to give us some detail, after months of assurances—and self-congratulations, quite frankly—we have another statement, with broad motherhood statements and a lack of detail. We do not know who is really getting support. We just do not know very much more than the motherhood statements that the minister has been delivering for most of this year.

We have a hotline. We have a statement that recruitment is progressing. My goodness! How much time do you need to actually have the staff that are needed to fulfil the government's own commitment? These are not things that we have laid on the government. These are commitments where the minister has said, "This will happen from 1 October. We're going to be ready." This has been the case, as Ms Carrick said, from over 12 months ago, really. As Miss Nuttall mentioned, where is the detail? Where is the data? That is what the community would like to see.

Just last week, my office called the Thriving Kids hotline. We thought, "Okay, let's see what's going on here." It was diverted to the West Belconnen Child and Family Centre. That does not sound like a dedicated Thriving Kids hotline. That was after the commencement on 1 October of Thriving Kids.

The government's own briefing from last month says that existing Child Development Service staff would pivot to Thriving Kids, with clinical workforce expansion commencing in January next year. What additional treatment capacity is actually available now? We just do not know. Redirecting callers to other services does not really line up with the minister's commitments.

We have had, basically, very broad motherhood statements from the minister this morning. She had an opportunity to say, "Here's what I've actually done since the big announcement in February," and with over 12 months notice that this would be a need for our community, given the NDIS changes.

It is incredibly disappointing. I support the criticisms and statements from Ms Carrick and Miss Nuttall. This government needs to do better. It needs, at the very least, to meet its own commitments and promises—something on which we are seeing a track record of failure.

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) (10.58): I want to speak briefly as the Minister for Child Development and Wellbeing, who is responsible for the delivery of a range of the Thriving Kids services through the Child Development Service and Child and Family Centres.

I will go first to Mr Cain's expressed concern that the Thriving Kids Information and Navigation phone line—its actual name—diverted to the Child and Family Centres. We have been very clear that Child and Family Centres are the front door for Thriving Kids. If you go to the website, it says, "Talk to us. Talk to a Child and Family Practitioner. You can contact us yourself. You do not need a referral." It provides the phone line and says, "In person: Visit a Child and Family Centre in Gungahlin, Tuggeranong or West Belconnen."

I was very pleased to recently visit the Tuggeranong Child and Family Centre and to speak to a couple of the staff who are staffing the telephone line. They said they have not been particularly busy at this point. I guess that is unsurprising, because the rest of the service system has not actually changed at this point with the introduction of the first phase of Thriving Kids. But it is not the case, as others have indicated, that the only new thing available is the intake service.

As of 1 October, therapeutic services have been expanded at the Child Development Service. Until 1 October, direct therapeutic support was only available, as a result of an expansion under Minister Berry, to 24- to 36-month-old children. That is now available for children aged zero to eight. Among other things, this means that the children who previously had no access to services to address early presentations of disability, developmental delay or neurodiversity now have a service to access.

Parents may have had no access because their children did not meet NDIS eligibility thresholds, including the eligibility threshold we were not expecting in the establishment of NDIS which required two areas of developmental delay to access the NDIS early childhood pathway. But it is also the case that the NDIS is hard to navigate. Particularly, there are parents for whom system navigation is a challenge at the best of times. Many of their children were missing out on services because their parents did not have the capacity to navigate a really complex service system or to manage an individual funding plan.

Miss Nuttall expressed concern about Minister Butler's comments that Thriving Kids would be more efficient, but it seems to me to be an obvious proposition. Having worked at a disability service provider that was previously block funded when I worked there, and supporting, as Minister for Disability, its transition at the time to try to fund itself through NDIS individual packages—the inconvenience for that service provider, Pegasus, and the schools, parents and communities that had access to that service—the

increased cost of administration to do that was significant. Going back to providing universal access and targeted access to block-funded supports is both more efficient and more accessible for parents, children and their families.

I would encourage any family who has a concern about their child's development to get in touch with a Child and Family Centre. The funding that Ms Orr has been talking about will expand services at Child and Family Centres and will expand services at the Child Development Service. There is also significantly more information available on the ACT government's website and the national Thriving Kids website. Yes, this is a staged rollout, but it is not the case that nothing has changed. Things have changed. Families, as they become more familiar with the service, will no doubt continue to access these services.

To Miss Nuttall and Ms Carrick's point about data and transparency, we will absolutely continue to report on the services that Child and Family Centres and the Child Development Service are delivering, and, more broadly, the services that are being delivered through Thriving Kids.

I will finish on this point—and I think Mr Emerson made this point in the Assembly: it is extraordinary to me that we have been seeing our results in the Australian Early Development Census going backwards. We know that there were significant gaps in the service system for children with developmental delay, emerging disability and neurodiversity, and the NDIS was not filling those gaps and was not able to fill those gaps. Thriving Kids is an opportunity to build a stronger system for early support for children who need that support, and for all families, no matter their background, to be able to access the support that their children need. I, for one, absolutely welcome this investment.

MS ORR (Yerrabi—Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, Minister for Climate Change, Environment, Energy and Water, Minister for Disability, Autism and Neurodiversity, Minister for Housing and Homelessness, and Minister for Equality) (11.04): I would like to make a few additional comments in response to comments raised by members. The first point I would like to make—which I have made on several occasions and, I dare say, will continue to have to make in light of others wanting to ignore my comments—is that this has always been a progressive rollout.

The idea that everything would be sorted on 1 October and that there would not be a staged implementation is really dismissive of everything that has been put on the record very clearly about how this program is being implemented. When we reach 1 January 2028, the program will continue to be reviewed and improved over time, as in every government program and service delivery that comes about. The comments by a number of members around not having enough information and not having enough supports from day one are really disingenuous as to the approach that is being taken and misalign the expectation and the reality. I and the government have not sought to present otherwise, so I am not quite sure why we keep having this case prosecuted.

On Miss Nuttall's comments about the workforce and wanting to see more, workforce provisions are being led by the federal government. The reason our roadmap says we will develop it specific to the ACT is that it will align with the work that the federal government is doing. Our component of that work has not come into consideration for

action within the current rollout. It will come in due course. We have put it there to be transparent and open, which is another request that always comes from Miss Nuttall and the Greens. In doing so, we are now being told that it is not good enough. There is a bit of conflicting information and mixed messaging. I can assure Miss Nuttall that the federal government is working on workforce development. The ACT government will continue to support that. We will continue to put in our roadmap how we will be doing that and we will provide more information through the progressive rollout of this program in due course.

Comments were also made about cost shifting from the feds to the states and territories. While this is part of the broader discourse around all the reforms that are going on with the NDIS, it is very important to remember that Thriving Kids, as my colleague Ms Stephen-Smith has already pointed out, is about meeting unmet demand. That is not a cost shift; it is actually funding to provide for people who do not have access to the services and supports we would like them to have.

I would also point out that there have been no access changes to the NDIS. The federal government has made a commitment that there will not be access changes to the NDIS, including the early pathways program, prior to foundational supports being fully rolled out on 1 January 2028. It is not the case that we have taken on more people within our service systems. We are looking at unmet demand and also the model of getting supports to people earlier and with fewer obstacles.

Miss Nuttall made a distinction which I think is important to note: early childhood and disability are different. Children may have a delay in early childhood. That does not mean it will be a disability or will continue to impact them throughout their life. I thank Miss Nuttall for raising that point, because it is critical to how we look at this. What I think needs to be added to that, though, is that, particularly with children when we see disabilities that have lower or moderate support needs and manifestations, it is not always possible to distinguish—particularly in very young children—whether it is purely a developmental delay or it is a disability. I am couching my words a bit with disclaimers because there are times when we can diagnose a disability, but, where we have uncertainty, the approach and the response to supports is very similar.

As I think Miss Nuttall pointed out, while this is coming from the disability portfolio and while this is funded through Disability, the focus should not be on developmental delay as much as it should be on disability. There is a balance, because developmental delay, particularly in the very young, will be supported for children with disability and, in a lot of instances, we will be doing it prior to being able to diagnose a disability. That is the whole point of getting supports to children earlier. Having said that, I note the distinction is important to remember as we shape supports through the program, particularly for children in the categories for those aged five and over.

Around not knowing what the model is going to do, or not having an idea—this goes to Mr Cain's comments around not even knowing what has happened on day one—I literally read out a list of everything that has been progressed since day one, in the first phase. Again, I note it is a progressive rollout. It is not that everything will be done on the first day. Regarding not having a good idea about the service model, I again refer members to the national model for Thriving Kids, which we have to be consistent with. It is publicly available and I tabled it during estimates hearings for all members,

including a number who have made comments about not knowing what the model is.

On the point of demand forecasting and not knowing the number of people who will need these supports or what they will be needing, I reiterate that I have made the point countless times in this chamber that Thriving Kids is about meeting unmet demand and that there is a level of uncertainty. Hence, we have implemented a try, test and develop model, so that we are learning as we go along. That has been taken by some to imply that we are ignorant. That is not the case at all. It is a reflection that we do not have an understanding of unmet service need, because it is unmet, and we need to continue to be cognisant of informing ourselves of what that is and refining our service provision as our understanding grows. To me, that is good service delivery and policy design; it is not a failing.

In closing, I again reiterate to all members that this is a progressive rollout and the ACT is certainly not anywhere near as disorganised, or not ready for what is occurring, as some of the comments today would indicate. Putting those comments out, when so much information has been provided to this chamber, is creating concern and alarm that is not necessary and not needed, when there is so much other reform going on.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Planning—Manuka Hotel site—order to table documents

MS CARRICK (Murrumbidgee) (11.13): I move:

That, in accordance with standing order 213A, the Assembly orders the Minister for Planning and Sustainable Development to provide the Assembly with the following documents relating to the Manuka Hotel, DA 202038142 and any subsequent development applications, at Griffith section 96, blocks 1, 2 and 5:

- (1) all development applications, including amendments, with accompanying plans;
- (2) all building approvals submitted to the ACT Government and accompanying plans;
- (3) details of all ACT Government inspections, the reason and the date inspected;
- (4) all certifiers' inspection reports;
- (5) all notifications to Access Canberra about compliance; and
- (6) all reports relating to investigations.

I move this motion because there remains a remarkable degree of uncertainty, opaqueness and confusion about what occurred between the development that was approved and the development that was ultimately built. In July 2021, the development application was approved. That approval included five cinemas. Importantly, this was not a minor feature of the proposal. One of the stated reasons for approval was that the redevelopment provided new cinemas and a hotel, and that they would be significant for Manuka, bringing additional business to the area and additional accommodation. The planning merits of the proposal were, in part, founded on the economic and community benefits that the cinemas would bring to the Manuka precinct.

The approval documents acknowledge that the project had been lodged over two separate applications, making assessment difficult. They specifically noted uncertainty about how the various stages would integrate, particularly at the basement and ground floor levels, which were intended to accommodate the cinemas. Then, in June 2023, the development approval was amended as part of a lease variation process. Cinema floor space was reduced to 630 square metres, yet there were no accompanying plans available on the DA website that clearly demonstrated what that meant for the layout of the development, the ground floor activation or the tiered cinema seating that extended from the ground floor down to the basement. The amendment was approved on the basis that the development remained substantially the same as that originally approved.

But today, more than five years later, the position is far from clear. Many shopfronts in Manuka remain vacant or available for lease, the hotel remains unopened and, to all appearances, there are no cinemas in the completed building. That raises obvious questions: what happened to the cinemas; when did the government first become aware they would not be delivered; how did a development approval on the basis of delivering cinemas end up being constructed without them; was the completed development consistent with the approved development application; what compliance checks were undertaken; what inspections occurred; what role did the private certifier play; and what oversight was exercised by government?

The answers we have received to date have only deepened the confusion. On 2 June this year, in response to question on notice 1095, the minister advised that the matter remained the subject of an active investigation and that no further information could be provided. The Assembly was similarly advised, in September 2025, that an investigation was underway. That is over 12 months ago. Yet last week, in response to question on notice 1273, we were advised that there are currently no active investigations underway in relation to this development. At the same time, we were told that the Territory Planning Authority proactively and reactively audits developments to ensure compliance with approvals. These statements raise more questions than they answer. If there was an active investigation, what happened to it? When was it concluded? What did it find? What compliance activities were undertaken?

The government will make the case that the internal layout of the building can change without a DA. However, we are not talking about just a change in how the internal rooms are arranged. This is a structural change whereby the tiered seating from the ground floor to the basement was changed to a flat ground floor without cinemas. And, if a development approved with cinemas was constructed without cinemas, was there ever consideration of whether development had occurred other than in accordance with the approved development application, which should have triggered a controlled activity order under the Planning Act?

Canberrans are entitled to confidence in the integrity of the planning system. That confidence depends on transparency. If there has been a compliance failure, we should understand it so it can be fixed. If there is a gap between planning approvals, building approvals, private certification, compliance monitoring and enforcement, we should identify it and address it. And, if everything was done appropriately, the documents should demonstrate that.

This motion is not about relitigating the merits of the development; it is about transparency, accountability, and understanding how a project approved on the basis of delivering cinemas appears to have produced a very different outcome. The Assembly and the community deserve the documents in a timely manner. I have asked for documents that the government has on hand: plans, certifier inspection documents, and reports relating to investigations. It should not take long to gather these documents. I have requested no correspondence with developers or stakeholders. These documents should be government documents and they should be available in the folders on the drive. I first sought this information through a freedom of information request to the City and Environment Directorate in September 2025. More than a year later, that request remains unresolved. I still do not have the documents.

The minister has sought an extension to 30 calendar days. That takes us past the annual reports hearings. I am pretty keen to have these documents before the annual reports hearings so I can use them to ask questions in annual reports hearings. The minister will say that it is a significant diversion of government resources to get these documents. They should be on the drive. It is not clear to me why we cannot have these documents before annual reports hearings.

The Assembly should not be required to wait indefinitely for information that goes to the heart of public confidence in the planning system. Therefore, I do not support the amendment for an extension of time. The minister can say that it will be a significant resource constraint on CED, but it is not clear to me. The minister should come forward and say which of these requests actually require third-party consultation.

MR STEEL (Murrumbidgee—Treasurer, Minister for Planning and Sustainable Development, Minister for Heritage, and Minister for Sport and Recreation) (11.20): The government does not oppose the motion from Ms Carrick and we are not opposing the release of information. I understand that this 213A has arisen from an existing FOI application that she currently has with the City and Environment Directorate. I appreciate the amount of time that has passed since Ms Carrick initially submitted the application.

However, I am advised that the scope of this 213A today covers over half a thousand records and would require consultation with dozens of third parties whose information is contained amongst these records. These complexities have been communicated with Ms Carrick. I appreciate that it was not necessarily the intent of her motion for the government to have to consult on the release of records which may involve third parties. Nonetheless, I am advised by the directorate that it is a necessary requirement. That will have a significant impact on the City and Environment Directorate and will impact on the delivery of services through the redirection of resources to this task in a very short timeframe. That is why I have circulated an amendment which would extend the period for the production of the documents to 30 days. That gives a small amount of extra time for the City and Environment Directorate to undertake that work, any required consultation, and trawling through around 500 records, which is substantial.

The complexity of this surprised me. When I first saw the motion from Ms Carrick, I did not have a particular issue with the timeframe, but the advice from the City and Environment Directorate is that it is of a scale that would need some extra time and would involve potential consultation with third parties that are involved in those

records. It is important that those matters are taken into account by members of the Assembly. The government has been pretty clear about what our priorities are, particularly for the Territory Planning Authority which would no doubt be involved in this, as well as Access Canberra. We have been clear that we want them focusing on enforcing leases, we want them assessing and approving DAs, and we want them to progress the statutory planning work to enable more homes.

If members think it is a good idea to divert resources away from those tasks, that is fine, but they will be held accountable for the decisions that they make. I am asking members to take into account the advice that I have received—that this would divert a substantial amount of resources away from the tasks of government and the priorities of government, which I would have thought are important. We want to provide the documents, but a bit of extra time would assist, and I do not think it is unreasonable to provide at least 30 days.

I move:

Add:

“(7) notwithstanding the provisions of standing order 213A, the document or documents are to be provided within 30 calendar days.”.

MR COCKS (Murrumbidgee) (11.23): The Canberra Liberals are absolutely supporting Ms Carrick’s motion and will be opposing the government’s amendment on timeframes.

There is significant concern in the community, across the business sector, the small business sector in the Manuka area and across community organisations, around this development. There has been a considerable lack of transparency around a lot of the issues that Ms Carrick has raised, so I think it is very important that we do support this motion.

I want to say, though, in terms of the minister’s characterisation of 15 days as being a short timeframe, that 15 days is the standard amount that is contained in the standing orders. It is the standard timeframe. It is not massively short. If he has a problem with the standing orders, there will be a review of the standing orders in due course, and it should be presented to that review.

Ms Cheyne: Oh, it will be.

MR COCKS: The Attorney-General says, “It will be,” as it should, and it will require some consideration. I would hope that they put together a better argument than, “It will involve potential consultation,” which is a fantastic way of saying, “There might be consultation required.”

We support the timeframe that has been put forward. It is the standard timeframe. It should not be the default position of this Assembly that, every time the government says that it will be inconvenient to comply with the will of the Assembly, it needs more time to do so. On this occasion, we are very comfortable with asking for the standard timeframe.

MS CLAY (Ginninderra) (11.25): The Greens will be supporting Ms Carrick's motion in its original form, and I thank Minister Steel for engaging with us constructively on this one. It was a difficult call for us. It is the standard timeframe, the 15 days. That is what is set out in the standing orders. I know Ms Carrick had a view that it is very useful information to have ahead of annual reports hearings, and I can certainly see the benefit of that. Extending this out to 30 days would miss that.

This is certainly information that is of high public interest. We have an inquiry on foot that heard evidence about this matter this week. I will not reflect on that because it is under inquiry in that space, but the community gave pretty clear evidence about their expectations and what had gone on in this matter. I think there is ample benefit in getting the information out, and in getting the information out in time to be tested in multiple fora.

We are, of course, very concerned that we do have good lease enforcement and good statutory planning and DA decision-making. Everybody here is probably united in wanting government and public servants to have the resources they need to make those decisions well. I am slightly uncomfortable about a member who is exercising ordinary scrutiny on a matter of high public interest using the tools that are available, and being told that this will stop government doing ordinary business.

I would note that we are aware that some DAs are already taking a long time to process. There was one that was lodged in August 2025 that was not approved until October 2026. We are running an inquiry on lease squatting and lease enforcement at the moment, which is showing that, over a history of decades, there has been a lack of enforcement.

If government says that the reason we cannot make lease enforcement and statutory planning decisions now is because of this, it will be difficult for us to understand that. But I do think it is important that, where there is a clear matter of public interest, we do get the information out. I think that Ms Carrick is entitled to ask for it to be provided within the normal statutory timelines. We welcome a discussion about what those statutory timelines should be, in the review that is coming up. That is an excellent idea. In this instance, I think getting the information out before annual report hearings is well and truly worth it, so we are happy to support Ms Carrick's motion.

MR EMERSON (Kurrajong) (11.28): I rise to speak in support of Ms Carrick's motion. I regularly hear from Canberrans who are concerned about the lack of recreational spaces in our city, including in the inner south. Many locals are missing the old Capitol Theatre, which I, too, have fond memories of. Some of my first dates as a teenager were at the Capitol Theatre. It is critical that significant developments which reshape sites of significant public importance provide a significant community benefit.

The original development application for the Manuka hotel project, approved in 2021, included a six-storey building with multiple cinemas. It was touted as promising a boost for Manuka's economy and was set to play a key role in revitalising Manuka. But it appears that the number of cinemas has been reduced from five public cinemas to four, and now perhaps to just one private theatre. I understand the hotel is set to open soon, seemingly without any of the cinemas included in the original DA—a massive loss of

community benefit compared to what was originally promised by this project.

This is exactly the sort of thing—like the months-long closures of footpaths around construction sites—that drives Canberrans to ask all of us why big developers seem to have so much sway in this town. It remains unclear whether, in this case, the regulator has raised any compliance concerns; and, if not, why not? That is why I think Ms Carrick is right to bring this motion to the Assembly today, calling for scrutiny of what is going on here.

Whether it is Manuka hotel, Hawker tennis centre or Big Splash, a planning system is not much use if compliance is optional. A DA process with public consultation is not much use if the DA does not need to be followed, and if the members of the public who were consulted have no control over whether what is built actually conforms to what they were consulted on.

Canberrans are calling for more action against commercial leaseholders who do not follow the rules, which often appears to be happening in pursuit of finding a more lucrative use, without providing the same level of community benefit. A question on notice that I lodged recently shows there has only been one lease terminated over the last 10 years for failing to meet their statutory requirements, and that was a residential lease.

We need to ensure that our planning system can protect important community assets and outcomes when a lessee ceases operations, fails to meet their maintenance obligations, or pursues alternative development options, as appears to have occurred in this case.

We have seen a breakdown of trust when it comes to planning regulation in the ACT, and a lack of transparency in some of our planning and regulatory processes. Access Canberra conceded during its appearance at the ongoing inquiry into controlled activity orders that it could be more transparent in its own decision-making. Our community deserves this transparency.

Canberrans should have confidence that what gets approved through our planning system is what gets built, and that the laws in our books are being enforced. Ultimately, if someone says they are doing something, if the planning process has allowed the project to go ahead on the basis of what they have said, and then they do not do it, there should be consequences for that.

It is to the credit of Ms Carrick that she is pushing for transparency, scrutiny and accountability in relation to this project. I want to thank her for bringing her planning expertise to an issue in my electorate, which, of course, affects residents of her electorate, too. There are a lot of questions to answer here, and this motion is, on my read, a very sensible way to ask them, which is why I will be supporting its passage today, unamended.

I also want to touch briefly on what Ms Clay was speaking about, regarding the diversion from ordinary business. We need to accept that part of core government business is producing documents in response to motions from the Assembly; it is producing documents through freedom of information requests. This is actually core

government business, so any time that argument is brought forward in this place, especially given—as Ms Carrick pointed out—the sensible scope of this order, I think it should be rejected, because this is something that governments have to do. All governments have to do it, and it is appropriate in this case that that is done promptly.

MS VASSAROTTI (Kurrajong) (11.32): There are a number of certainties in this building that one gets rather exhausted of debating—the virtues of light rail, while it is already halfway down the city, the impact of housing debt, no matter who is in charge, up in the big parliament. Also, more and more, there are the failures of our planning system.

The decisions being made about what is built where in our community often seem to have the same underlying theme. Always, there is a clear idea from the community about need and amenity, but what is more prominent, in the government's way of thinking, is the profit motive of the corporations seeking development in the first place.

No doubt, in this debate, the government will cite the independence of the Planning Authority as a thinly veiled excuse for the lack of care put into decision-making around venues like the Manuka hotel. The reality is that independence, in the case of big decisions that impact the community deeply, is just buck-passing. The government can and should be actively engaged in the outcomes we see in our community.

I thank Ms Carrick for bringing forward this motion regarding a development in my electorate. As Ms Clay has noted, the Greens will be supporting the motion as an accountability measure to bring to light exactly how decisions were made around this development and, hopefully, to start to answer a number of the questions that have been left unanswered.

Is it any wonder that people are losing faith in the effectiveness of democratic representation when issues like this prove that it is not working? Members of this place must take an active interest in the development of our community. Right now, and all too often, it is being left to community members to raise concerns directly through arduous and often ineffective consultation processes. These processes take time and money, and they take a mental bandwidth that all of us in this place should be trying to reduce, enabling our constituents not to spend their time engaging with questionable processes, but enjoying their lives, enjoying our parks, public spaces and, yes, cinemas.

For a developer to put forward a development application and then slowly renege on key commitments of that application is a real bastardisation of the idea of active government. Developers are riding roughshod in Canberra, from building new developments to “diversify” away from gambling revenue—without any requirement to actually diversify away from gambling revenue—to building near-million-dollar apartments and then crying poor, and that they could not possibly sacrifice one to be public housing.

These people are making a mockery of the rules, and we are letting them do so right now. People in this place are letting them get away with this, and our community is sick and tired of it—sick and tired of poor outcomes, sick and tired of always having to advocate for ground-level impacts, and sick and tired of their advocacy falling on deaf ears.

I would like to thank Ms Carrick for bringing this motion to the Assembly. I thank her for her advocacy on behalf of her constituency, as well as some of my own, in the electorate of Kurrajong, on this matter. I look forward to continuing to work with her to hold developers accountable for the needs and aspirations of our local community.

Amendment negatived.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Legal Affairs—Standing Committee Report 12

MS BARRY (Ginninderra) (11.36): I present the following report:

Legal Affairs—Standing Committee—Report 12—Inquiry into the Emergencies Amendment Bill 2026, dated 14 October 2026, together with extracts of the relevant minutes of proceedings.

I move:

That the report be noted.

This is the 12th report of the Standing Committee on Legal Affairs for the Eleventh Assembly. This inquiry commenced on 17 June 2026.

The bill is intended to provide a new model for emergency management in the ACT. The committee received seven submissions during the inquiry, with the overwhelming majority raising concerns about the proposed changes. The committee made one recommendation. On behalf of the committee, I would like to thank all who made submissions to the inquiry.

I thank the other members of the committee, Mr Werner-Gibbings and Ms Vassarotti. I commend the report to the Assembly.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Economics, Industry and Recreation—Standing Committee Statement by chair

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS (Brindabella) (11.37): Pursuant to standing order 246A, I wish to make a statement on behalf of the Standing Committee on Economics, Industry and Recreation relating to referred petitions.

Earlier this year, the committee was referred petitions e-pet 032-26 and pet 048-26— inquiry into the collapse of Gungahlin United Football Club—and e-pet 047-26— inclusion of Woden Valley Soccer Club in the National Premier League Girls competition.

The committee has resolved not to inquire into these petitions. However, we recognise

community concerns about sporting organisation governance, and we hope to undertake a self-referred inquiry into this matter in 2027.

Social Policy—Standing Committee Statement by chair

MR EMERSON (Kurrajong) (11.38): Pursuant to standing order 246A, I wish to make a statement on behalf of the Standing Committee on Social Policy relating to its consideration of e-petition 045-26, petition 053-26 and petition 059-26—save senior fitness programs at CIT Bruce.

This petition was referred to the committee on 10 June 2026. The committee considered the petition at its private meetings on 12 June 2026 and 13 October 2026 and resolved not to undertake an inquiry into the terms of the petition.

However, the committee is interested in conducting a broader inquiry into preventive health for seniors in the ACT and will be discussing with the community the potential terms of reference for this inquiry. The committee considers that the matters raised in these petitions will form part of this broader inquiry.

The committee would like to advise the Assembly that it intends to consider the community feedback and will provide further advice on the inquiry's terms of reference and timelines in due course.

Holidays (Anzac Day) Amendment Bill 2026

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

Title read by Clerk.

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) (11.39): I move:

That this bill be agreed to in principle.

I present the Holidays (Anzac Day) Amendment Bill 2026 to the Assembly. This bill corrects an inconsistency in our public holiday arrangements for Anzac Day and provides a clear legislative approach to occasions when it falls on a weekend.

Anzac Day holds an important place in Australian history. Of course, it is the anniversary of the day in 1915 when soldiers from the Australian and New Zealand Army Corps landed on the beaches at Gallipoli, as part of the allies' invasion of Turkey during the First World War.

The first Anzac Day commemorations were held the very next year, and it was not long before it became an observed public holiday in every Australian state. Today, 25 April is a national day of significance, of remembrance and of reflection. It is befitting of the

day and its significance to have the observance of a public holiday. In doing this, we elevate the importance of the occasion and provide our community with the opportunity to participate in commemorations.

Whether it is attending a dawn service, the veterans' march, catching up with friends and former service members for a reunion, or simply taking time to pause and remember, the Anzac Day public holiday gives people time to reflect on the service and sacrifice of those who have served our country in wars, conflict and peace operations.

I believe the Assembly has never explicitly considered our arrangements for the Anzac Day public holiday. Current arrangements were adopted in the Holidays Ordinance of 1958 and have remained unchanged since self-government. In these 1958 arrangements, the treatment of Anzac Day is inconsistent on weekends, and out of step with the way most other public holidays are observed.

For the benefit of the record, I will briefly explain current public holiday arrangements when Anzac Day falls on a weekend. When 25 April falls on a Saturday, that Saturday is a public holiday. There is no public holiday on the following Monday. When 25 April falls on a Sunday, that Sunday is not a public holiday. It is still Anzac Day, and we observe all the usual traditions on the Sunday, but the public holiday happens on the Monday after Anzac Day.

This inconsistency is not a product of this Assembly and, in our community, it can have real impacts. Most plainly, if someone wants to attend a service where it falls on a Sunday, they will not be guaranteed a day off work. For those who work on weekends regularly, this may mean they are left out of marking the occasion entirely.

This arrangement is out of step with other days of significance, such as New Year's Day, Christmas Day or Boxing Day. For some workers, having a public holiday on a weekend is like having no public holiday at all. For those who ordinarily work on a weekend, not having the protections of a public holiday, when Anzac Day falls on a Sunday, can mean missing out on observing this very important day. We do not want any veteran or their family members to miss out on observing Anzac Day should they wish to do so.

The ACT government has considered this issue over a number of years and has utilised declaration powers to make arrangements when Anzac Day falls on a weekend. As minister, this is exactly what I have done in relation to Anzac Day next year. I have declared 25 April and 26 April public holidays, to provide the usual weekend public holiday arrangements for Anzac Day. I believe Anzac Day, 25 April, should be a public holiday every year.

Mr Deputy Speaker, I acknowledge this is an issue that arises infrequently. Simple mathematics will tell you that Anzac Day will fall on a weekend in two of every seven years. But due to leap years falling in a specific way, it will next happen in 2032. While I appreciate it is not every day that this Assembly debates matters so far in advance, in the interest of providing certainty to employers and employees alike, I think it is important to settle this matter now.

Before preparing the bill, the government has undertaken targeted consultation with

veterans' representatives, employer associations, trade unions, industry associations and government agencies, with a view to legislating permanent arrangements for the day. The views expressed in consultation all recognised the importance of the day but were mixed in support for legislating an additional public holiday where Anzac Day falls on a weekend.

I appreciate the views put and have considered them carefully. Ultimately, it is untenable in my mind that Anzac Day would have a lesser treatment than Boxing Day. Accordingly, this bill ensures that 25 April will always be a public holiday, regardless of the day of the week on which it falls. When that day is on a weekend, an additional public holiday will be observed on the following Monday.

I believe these arrangements are entirely fitting for a day of such significance and ensure that our community is supported to pause and reflect on what can be a deeply personal day for many in our community. This bill will also reduce the reliance on making individual declarations each time this issue arises, and it allows the Assembly to make a clear legislative decision on how we mark Anzac Day, separate to that of the 1958 ordinance.

Whilst I acknowledge that this is an infrequent issue, it is an important issue to get right. It is the view of the government that this bill appropriately elevates the significance of Anzac Day on weekends and clarifies the public holiday arrangements for future years. Anzac Day must always be a public holiday, and this bill will ensure that. I commend the bill to the Assembly.

Debate (on motion by **Mrs Morris**) adjourned to the next sitting.

Planning (Missing Middle Housing) Amendment Bill 2026

Debate resumed from 24 March 2026 on motion by **Mr Steel**:

That this bill be agreed to in principle.

MRS MORRIS (Brindabella) (11.44): I have said it before and I will say it again: the Canberra Liberals want to restore the hope of home ownership, because we believe that everyone should have a roof over their head and they should have the opportunity to attain ownership of that home. Helping Canberrans realise their dream of owning their own home is a social, economic and moral imperative, because a home of your own gives a family stability, it provides a place where you can put down roots and it gives you greater security for your future. Planning decisions determine whether that opportunity is within reach or whether another generation of Canberrans will be left behind.

This government has spent many years making promises about housing affordability while presiding over a planning system that makes delivering homes unnecessarily difficult and prohibitively expensive. The squeeze on housing supply and escalating housing costs are fundamental drivers of our current housing crisis. That is why changes to the planning regime to address the ACT's housing shortage and the attendant housing affordability crisis have been unanimously recognised by this place and are subsequently a defining policy objective of this Assembly.

A well-functioning housing market which provides a wide variety of affordable, quality housing is fundamental to the wellbeing of individuals, families and society at large. In a growing city like ours this means also an increase to the total number of dwellings to keep up with our fast-growing population. All aspects of the housing market have proven problematic here in Canberra.

In July 2024, prior to the election, the ACT government committed to delivering 30,000 new homes by 2030. It is a target that the current government is struggling to achieve and which the housing industry believes is already unachievable. The failure to achieve this target goes hand in hand with significant increases in the price of housing, and there has also been a lack of variety in new housing due to the government's policy of strangling land release for single dwellings on a block of land, with only 182 single dwelling blocks being scheduled for release in 26/27. This has driven a steady and significant flow of Canberrans to existing towns and new developments in New South Wales. Families who want to buy a home with a garden where the kids can play, kick around and play backyard cricket should not be priced out of Canberra, but that is what is happening to too many Canberrans. Canberra should be a place where growing families can afford to raise their children close to their families, to their work and to the community that they call home.

The reality is industry confidence across the ACT has fallen to its lowest level in Australia according to the latest Procore Property Council confidence survey. The ACT's confidence index has fallen to 55.6, well below the neutral benchmark of 100, and the lowest result recorded by any Australian jurisdiction. The Property Council ACT and Capital Region Executive Director Ashlee Berry said that the findings reflect growing concern about the cumulative impact of costs, regulation and uncertainty on development feasibility. She said:

The message from industry is not that reform should stop, it's that every new cost, requirement and layer of red tape has consequences for investment decisions.

According to Master Builders ACT, 45.6 per cent of all insolvencies in the ACT over the three months to August were construction businesses. This should serve as a wake-up call, but instead often we hear from this government and the planning minister great joy and excitement in publicly undermining builders and developers in the construction sectors—the very people and the very industry that we rely on to get homes delivered and built for this city. They will take any opportunity to smear the entire industry as dodgy because of the poor behaviour of just a few. The reality is the government will never achieve its own policy objectives and Canberra will never get the houses it needs to provide housing for our growing population without the property and construction sector. A confident industry is critical to improving housing supply and affordability, and there are many contributing factors to the housing problems in Canberra that have built up over many, many years under this government.

The Canberra Liberals do recognise that these will not all be fixed overnight and they will not all be fixed with a single piece of legislation. That is why the Canberra Liberals have supported the government in its attempts to address part of the problem through the missing middle housing reforms even though the government is determined to continue with fundamentally flawed policies such as strangling the supply of new

blocks for standalone houses. It is within this context that we have supported the missing middle policies.

This amendment bill provides an easier path to developing existing suburban blocks to provide granny flats, dual- and tri-occupancy developments and small-scale subdivisions. The bill makes changes to the planning regime which will assist the government in its objective of 30,000 homes by 2030. The Canberra Liberals note the discussion in the explanatory memorandum of the balance that the government has tried to achieve between achieving the target of 30,000 homes with protecting the rights of all residents to a fair and principled planning regime.

The bill provides that all single dwelling leases may also be used for a secondary residence. Currently, leases need to be varied to permit a secondary residence on a residential block, and a variation to authorise a secondary residence is currently exempt from the lease variation charge under the act. Given, as the law currently stands, there is no financial, strategic or procedural benefit associated with requiring a lease to be varied to permit a second dwelling, we consider this to be a sensible reform.

The bill amends the definition of “subdivision development proposal” to exclude smaller scale subdivisions from being designated as significant development. The effect of this change is a shorter approval timeframe, from 60 working days to 35, and one less public notification period. The bill also seeks to establish a new process for exempt variations to nominal rent Crown leases, which would require decisions to be made in 10 working days.

We know that Canberra is loved for many of its unique and intentional designs around low-density garden suburbs, framed by surrounding hills and nature reserves. We are—Canberra is—the garden city and the bush capital, and the Canberra Liberals recognise that there is some concern in the community that the missing middle housing reforms may risk trading away Canberra’s defining green identity, its urban tree canopy, biodiversity and garden city heritage in place for rapid urban infill. It is fundamentally important that, as a city, we do not lose our unique character.

We believe this bill has tried to strike the right balance between streamlining processes and delivering the homes that Canberrans need while still ensuring that there are safeguards in place to moderate reform in a way that is consistent with the territory’s city and suburban character. We note some of those safeguards, the subdivisions and consolidations, as envisioned by the missing middle housing reforms, will continue to be assessed through the DA process as non-significant developments, and third-party appeal rights in this case will remain largely unchanged by the bill. A further safeguard is that members of the public may still seek judicial review of development decisions where this is available under the Administrative Decisions (Judicial Review) Act.

There are many challenges and barriers to overcome to fix Canberra’s housing problem, and we recognise that there are no easy solutions and this problem is not going to be fixed overnight. It is in the spirit of compromise and the recognition of the seriousness of the housing problem that we confront that the Canberra Liberals support this bill.

MS CLAY (Ginninderra) (11.57): The Greens will support this bill. The ACT Greens have long advocated for an increase in density, and, as we spoke about yesterday, that

goes hand in hand with an urban growth boundary and with protecting our environment. We are expecting around 700,000 people to be living in Canberra by 2050, and these people will need homes that will allow them to live their best life possible. With the missing middle planning reforms that were passed in June 2026, I hope a lot of these people will find a home to live in within our established suburbs, maybe in a row house, a terrace house, a townhouse or a low-rise apartment.

This bill was introduced earlier this year while the debate about missing middle planning reforms was ongoing. The bill sought to introduce changes which were designed to simplify or improve processes related to subdivisions, secondary residences and some lease variations. The Environment and Planning Committee, which I chair, conducted an inquiry into the bill. It noted that the bill proposed changes which should simplify and shorten timeframes and which should encourage proponents and landholders to take up missing middle opportunities. There are no changes to that part of the assessment process which considers the proposed development and what impact the built form might have on the adjoining dwellings and the surrounding residential area.

The activities covered by the bill are considered to be simple and low risk. Adding additional dwellings to a lease can either be done separately or after built form proposals have been considered as part of a development application. As part of the DA process there will be public consultation, and the proposal will be assessed against the outcomes and requirements specified in the Territory Plan.

The committee made four recommendations, two of which are not agreed by government. In the main, this is because the changes are considered to improve the processing without having any built form impacts and because it could not support a sunset clause for what it considers to be minor and technical changes. I was hopeful government would accept these amendments, but I do note government gave assurances it would monitor and report on the uptake of missing middle housing, including reporting on the typologies, their distribution across the city and their impacts on issues like transport, parking, amenity and green space. These all need to be captured and evaluated as part of the outcomes evaluation component of the planning system evaluation framework. We hope that if there are any issues associated with the process changes outlined in the bill, those will come through that.

The Greens understand that we need to make better use of Canberra's existing footprint to provide the homes Canberrans need—housing close to shops and public transport, jobs and schools, community facilities, parks and paths. We have got the planning policies in place, and this bill will help us with the administrative processing to make it easier to get homes on the ground quicker.

The Greens will support this bill, but we will keep an eye on how these changes progress, and we will pursue the recommended changes where we think what is in place is not working. I commend Minister Steel for the work that he and his directorate have put into the missing middle housing and planning reforms, and I want to thank his office for taking the time to make sure that we were briefed and had our questions answered on these proposals.

MR STEEL (Murrumbidgee—Treasurer, Minister for Planning and Sustainable

Development, Minister for Heritage, and Minister for Sport and Recreation) (12.00), in reply: I thank members. I am happy to conclude debate, and it will be relatively short given the briefing that is just about to occur. I would like to thank everyone for their support of this bill, which is a practical reform which will help to build more homes for Canberrans sooner.

I am very pleased that this bill supports missing middle housing reforms, which came into effect on 1 July, which is the largest reform to our residential housing policy in terms of zoning change in decades. It is a significant step forward and enables additional housing opportunities across the vast majority of blocks in Canberra that are already zoned as residential, but homes in the missing middle housing typology were not previously permitted.

The opportunity for more housing that we have created will help to address the demands of our growing population, and this bill complements the reforms in response to the high level of support and feedback from the public and industry for the streamlined assessment of delivery of this form of housing.

The purpose of this bill is to support the timely delivery of more housing diversity and supply across the territory through a streamlined, proportionate and effective approvals process. We have heard from Canberrans that they want more housing in existing residential areas where they want to live. This is what these changes will help to deliver. I commend the bill to the Assembly.

I table a revised explanatory statement following the scrutiny committee's inquiry.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Bill agreed to in principle.

Leave granted to dispense with the detail stage.

Bill agreed to.

Sitting suspended from 12.02 to 2 pm.

Questions without notice

ACT public service—employee found to have engaged in serious corrupt conduct

MR PARTON: My question is to the Chief Minister. Chief Minister, yesterday the Attorney-General refused to confirm whether Mr Joshua Ceramidas, who has been found to have engaged in serious corrupt conduct, is still employed in the ACT public service. Just this morning, in media, your current Deputy Chief Minister said that it was not in the public interest, when asked. However, media have reported in recent hours—

Ms Stephen-Smith: I raise a point of order, Mr Speaker. The Leader of the Opposition has claimed that I commented on this matter publicly this morning. I want to clarify

that I did not make any comment on this matter this morning.

MR SPEAKER: Thank you. Continue on.

MR PARTON: Thank you, Mr Speaker. The media have just reported that Mr Ceramidas is in fact no longer employed in the ACT PS. It is funny what a bit of media attention can do. Chief Minister, can you tell me when Mr Ceramidas' employment ceased with the ACT PS? Did he resign or was his employment terminated?

MR BARR: Matters relating to Mr Ceramidas' employment are the responsibility of the ACT public service. The Head of Service has issued a statement today.

Mr Parton: You're the Chief Minister.

MR BARR: I do not have a role in determining the employment of any public servants bar one. Under the Public Sector Management Act, there is one public servant whose appointment I am responsible for, and that is the Head of Service. In relation to Mr Ceramidas's employment, the Head of Service has made a statement reflecting the fact that he is no longer an employee. It is reasonable to conclude that that occurred following the release of the Kingfisher report.

MR PARTON: Chief Minister, is it your understanding that Mr Ceramidas received a separation payment above his normal leave entitlements? If so, how much?

MR BARR: No, it is not my understanding. Suggestions of that kind are, I think, quite unhelpful.

Mr Parton: We were just asking.

MR BARR: Well, I have no understanding of a separation payment beyond whatever he would be entitled to.

Mr Cain: Will you take it on notice?

MR BARR: No, there is no matter to take on notice.

MS BARRY: Chief Minister, is Mr Ceramidas being paid by the ACT taxpayer in any capacity at all beyond just employment within the ACT public service?

MR BARR: Not that I am aware of.

Suburban Land Agency—land release program

MS CASTLEY: My question is to the Chief Minister. The Indicative Land Release Program claims to balance new housing supply with forecast demand. The current release program includes land for just 182 detached dwellings in 2026-27. Is that the government's estimate of demand for houses this year?

MR BARR: No; I think demand for houses will be higher than that, but, of course, the

government is not the only supplier of land. There are joint ventures. There are englobos releases, and there is land available through private sector developers. And, of course, there are 210,000 dwellings in the ACT that are privately owned.

MS CASTLEY: What is the government's estimate of unmet demand for detached dwellings in the ACT, and how will this demand be met?

MR BARR: Certainly, demand has fallen as a result of an increase in interest rates. The exact number is difficult to pin down at this point in the fiscal year, but I will take Ms Castley's question on notice, and we can report at the end of the fiscal year in regard to this matter.

Legal actions against the Integrity Commission—taxpayer funded legal fees

MS BARRY: My question is to the Attorney-General. Attorney-General, David Ferguson, Mr Steel's current chief of staff, took legal action against the Integrity Commission back in August 2025, which was ultimately dismissed with a costs order made against Mr Ferguson. Attorney-General, did the ACT government pay the costs order for Mr Ferguson? And if so, what was the amount?

MS CHEYNE: I will take it on notice.

MS BARRY: You might also like to take this on notice, if possible. Can you also take on notice what advice was sought and received and the recommendation around the costs ordered to be paid by ACT taxpayers?

MS CHEYNE: I will take it on notice.

MR CAIN: Attorney-General, how many other costs orders has the ACT Labor government billed to ACT taxpayers?

MS CHEYNE: I expect that there is some detail on this in annual reports, but I am happy to take it on notice. If it is sufficiently covered in the annual reports, I will refer the member to that.

Extreme weather—heat and smoke refuges

MR BRADDOCK: My question is to the Minister for Climate Change, Environment, Energy and Water. Minister, with the El Nino summer approaching it is vital the ACT government does all it can to protect Canberrans from the dangers of extreme heat, bushfires and smoke. Minister, what steps has the government undertaken to ensure there are accessible heat and smoke refuges for Canberrans this summer?

MS ORR: I thank the member for his question because there is quite a significant weather pattern in the La Niña forecast that could occur to varying extents over the summer period. I know that the climate change team that reports to me will do a lot of work around policy and areas across government where we can take measures. We work with a whole range of areas, including emergency response, and preparedness within

that.

Going to the member's specific question, which I think was a little bit different to where he started, on La Niña events, to asking what we are doing for smoke refuge and what we are doing for heat refuge. We have a number of measures in place that will go to looking at refuge for people to go into public places. We will have access to our swimming pools. We will have access to, dare I say it, libraries.

In other areas we are looking at upgrading, with continuing works across our government buildings to provide for more heat, cooling and mitigation there. We have programs that go out to help people financially with electrifying their properties and putting in place cooling and heating that will help with weather extremes and that includes our public housing tenants. There are a whole range of things. I think we can probably get that picture.

As to smoke refuge—this also goes back to the La Niña one—there is a lot of work done across our emergency services and across our Parks and Conservation Service as to how we prepare for the bushfire season. One of the best things we can do for minimising the impact of smoke is actually being prepared for the event of a fire as best as we can. I was just out the other week with the Parks and Conservation Service as they were running through their bushfire preparedness day, looking at all the forecasting, looking at the emergency response protocols and procedures, doing practice drills—*(Time expired.)*

MR BRADDOCK: Minister, how many of those refuges will be open on weekends or over the Christmas/New Year period where the libraries are shut?

MS ORR: As I sort of prefaced, dare I say libraries, because now we are focused in on one. There is a range of places that could be provided as refuge. I do not think I could list them all here, but the Minister for Government and City Services has told me that the libraries will be available in that time period, so I think that probably answers the specific question that the member had.

MS CLAY: Minister, what is the criteria for opening libraries and pools as heat and smoke refuges during periods where they would otherwise be closed?

MS CHEYNE: I will take libraries. I cannot take pools. I can confirm that Libraries ACT has met with emergency services and libraries would be opened as needed and on request of an incident controller to support. This is not dissimilar to the prior approach. Certainly the request of the incident controller is something that Libraries ACT stands ready to support.

Public schools—funding

MS LEE: My question is to the Minister for Education. Minister, in question time yesterday, in relation to the exceptions pool for school budgets, you said that the criteria were still being finalised. Yet, in answer to an earlier question, when I asked you where the shortfall in funding for the four specialists schools would come from, you said:

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.

Minister, how can you guarantee that the \$3 million shortfall in funding for specialist schools will come from the exceptions pool when you have not even finalised the criteria?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I did not say that the \$3 million would necessarily come from the exceptions pool.

Ms Lee interjecting—

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I provided it as an example of the funding that is available outside the \$7 million that Ms Lee—

Ms Lee interjecting—

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: Again, Mr Speaker, every single time Ms Lee asks a question, she then interjects during the answer. She has no interest in hearing the answer, but I would strongly encourage her to hear, again, what I can guarantee, and that is that no specialist school will see a reduction in funding between 2026 and 2027. I have said it every time I have been asked. We have a range of funding sources for our schools, and I am making that guarantee to this place and to parents of children in specialist schools. I really wish Ms Lee would move on from scaremongering about this particular issue.

MS LEE: Minister, how on earth can you guarantee that the funding will continue when (1) you have not confirmed the criteria for the exceptions and (2) you cannot, with any clarity, tell this Assembly how that \$3 million shortfall is going to be made up?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I refer Ms Lee to my previous answers.

MR COCKS: Minister, if the criteria for the exceptions pool are still being developed, doesn't that say that the government is basically making it up as it goes, rather than having a planned and transparent funding model?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: No; the shadow Treasurer is not correct. We have discussed this process on multiple occasions, and what we have been very clear about is that it is an iterative process. The Education Directorate was aware, when it went out to principals with their preliminary budget, based on their student resource allocation, that they did not hold all the information that schools held and that there would need to be an iterative process to work through risk assessment, staffing requirements and projected enrolments, recognising that the Education Directorate had an understanding of potential enrolments, but the schools would have further information about how many families had approached them for enrolments in the following year. All of that information is being collated. Yes, there are high-level areas of criteria, and that is being worked through this week. The analysis will be done through the week and next week with principals.

I want to again thank all the principals, school leaders and school communities who have engaged with the Education Directorate, as well as the small group of directorate

staff who have been working incredibly hard to ensure that we deliver on our commitment to a fairer and more equitable distribution of funding to our schools—something that this place seemed to agree to when the public school system resourcing review came out, but on which it is now taking a different position.

Public schools—funding

MS LEE: My question is to the Minister for Education. Minister, since the indicative budgets were presented to school principals, there has been significant and widespread confusion, distress and uncertainty across our school community. The union has raised concerns. ACT Parents has raised concerns. Principals have raised concerns. Parents have raised concerns. Students have raised concerns.

Mr Parton interjecting—

MS LEE: We have heard reports of learning support assistants being let go; programs being scaled back; principals struggling under the pressure of these decisions that they are forced to wear; and families worried about what this means for their children. Yet despite the concerns being raised by the people working and learning in our schools each and every day, you continue to insist—you continue to insist that there are no cuts. Minister, who is wrong: principals, staff, parents, the union or the students?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I do want to recognise that this matter has caused distress in school communities, but I would ask Ms Lee to look in the mirror, as to who is partially responsible for that. The amount of misinformation that the opposition is putting out—

Ms Lee interjecting—

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: —is not helpful in ensuring that there can be positive engagements with school communities.

Ms Lee interjecting—

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: We said right from the start that implementing the recommendation of the public schools resourcing review—which explicitly stated and recommended that there needed to be a re-allocation of resourcing between schools, to ensure there was more equitable funding of our education system and of our schools—would result in some schools seeing a reduction in funding between 2026 and 2027. We said that from the start.

We also said that the student resource allocation budgets that were being provided would require an iterative process, and that there was an exceptions process in place.

We recognised explicitly that this would be a challenging conversation, particularly for some principals. And again, I want to thank those principals and school communities that have leaned in and engaged with this process. I know that it has been difficult. I understand that, and I apologise about the difficulty—but it would have been less difficult if people were not taking the political opportunity to spread misinformation about it—

Mr Parton interjecting—

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: —and continuing to raise questions despite very firm assurances, indeed guarantees—

Ms Lee interjecting—

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: —in relation to specialist schools, which have been given in this place and elsewhere.

MS LEE: Minister, why should anyone—including the school communities—believe your version of what is happening, over the real-life experiences on the ground, of the very people who are dealing with these budget cuts?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I will emphasise again that school budgets for 2027 have not been finalised. And what I have said repeatedly is that I recognise that there are some challenging conversations to be had with principals and school communities in relation to budgets next year. I understand those situations are challenging.

I had a really good conversation at a recent mobile office with some teachers from one of the local schools close to where I was holding my mobile office, who talked through what their experience was, in sitting down with their principal. I also met with that particular principal. I met with a group of public education stakeholders as we worked through the implementation plan for the “One public education system” reform process, and I took the opportunity to engage with a number of the principals who were there about their experiences through this process, as well. Some were comfortable, others had significant concerns. I absolutely recognise that, and that is why I have taken pains to reiterate that no-one—no principal, no school leader and no school—is alone in this process; please work with the Education Directorate so there can be a better understanding of your school’s circumstances.

But we do need to make some decisions to respond to the recommendations of the public school system resourcing review, which was very clear that, in addition to reviewing the student resource allocation model, we also needed to do some redistribution of funding to ensure that our funding was equitable between schools.

MRS MORRIS: Minister, given that unions, principals, parents and students are all sounding the alarm. Is it really your position that every one of those groups has misunderstood the impact of these budget cuts, and only the government has got it right?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: No. Mr Speaker, I would refer Mrs Morris to my previous answer—

Ms Lee interjecting—

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: where I acknowledge that people do have legitimate concerns in relation to this matter.

Mr Parton interjecting—

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: But we can address their concerns and we can support them by providing factual information. Scaremongering, as the opposition is doing, is not helping.

Commonwealth—Disaster Ready Fund

MS CLAY: My question is to the Minister for Emergency Services. Last year, analysis by ACTCOSS suggested that the ACT government should have been able to access an additional \$7 million through round 3 of the commonwealth Disaster Ready Fund but this money was left on the table because the ACT government's applications did not meet the commonwealth's guidelines. Our applications were not good enough to fund.

Have you received feedback from the commonwealth on why those applications failed?

DR PATERSON: No, I have not. We are well past that round now. We will hopefully be announcing the successful applicants of the next round of disaster funding, and I would hope that the ACT is more successful this time.

MS CLAY: Minister, if you did not seek feedback on why the applications failed, how will you make sure that the next applications do not fail?

DR PATERSON: I think Ms Clay misunderstood me. I did seek feedback, but I never received feedback.

MR BRADDOCK: Minister, what is the total sum of grant applications provided to the commonwealth from the ACT government for round 4 of the Disaster Ready Fund.

DR PATERSON: I will take that on notice.

Energy—Energy Efficiency Council ACT scorecard

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: My question is to the Minister for Climate Change, Environment, Energy and Water. Minister, earlier this month, the Energy Efficiency Council released its inaugural State Energy Performance Policy Scorecard. What does the scorecard cover and how did the ACT perform?

MS ORR: I thank the member for his question. The scorecard found that the ACT is a national leader in energy policy performance, with the most comprehensive energy efficiency policy framework, including a wide range of incentives, consumer support and regulation.

Mr Parton: Sound a bit excited about it! C'mon, this is good news, isn't it?

MS ORR: Thank you for the interjection, Mr Parton, but I have to ignore you!

The scorecard rates policy settings in three main areas: energy efficiency, electrification and demand flexibility. The ACT was found to be the leading jurisdiction on energy efficiency policy, and the scorecard gave full marks to the ACT's consumer programs, including the Sustainable Home Advice Program and the Home Energy Support

Program, which provide tailored advice to households to improve home energy performance, and the Sustainable Household Scheme, the Home Energy Support Program and the Energy Efficiency Improvement Scheme, which support households to adopt efficient electrical appliances and thermal upgrades.

It also noted the ACT's strongly targeted approach, which focuses on assisting households that would otherwise face barriers to electrification and thermal performance upgrades, and the accessibility of ACT government programs. On electrification, it was noted that the ACT's Integrated Energy Plan provides a comprehensive pathway, including clear targets and actions and a strong equity focus. It also recognised the ACT's support for EV purchases and charging infrastructure.

There was further work recommended on our gas appliance phase-out, which we are already progressing. We have just concluded consultation on this matter and are considering what further measures we will take to support the transition off gas.

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: Minister, what benefits can ACT households and businesses expect from the ACT government's policies to improve energy efficiency?

MS ORR: In short, lower energy costs, so energy improvements and electrification are the best ways to help households lower their energy bills. An analysis from the Australian Energy Market Commission shows that a household that electrifies the energy use will reduce total energy costs by up to 90 per cent, paying back the initial investment in as little as four years. As the scorecard notes:

Efficiency is often the lowest-cost energy resource because it reduces the amount of energy that must be generated, transported and paid for in the first place.

Thermal performance upgrades and more efficient electric heating and cooling also provide a more comfortable indoor environment in the Canberra home and make homes more resilient to extreme weather events.

MS BERRY: How will the ACT government continue progressing energy efficiency improvements?

MS ORR: I thank the member for her question. The ACT's Climate Change Strategy first action plan identifies several new and continuing actions to improve energy efficiency across the ACT economy. We will continue to embed energy efficiency into planning and construction through minimum standards and mandatory disclosures, and we will review the Energy Efficiency Improvement Scheme to ensure that it continues to provide effectively targeted support to households and businesses that face the greatest barriers to electrification and improving energy efficiency.

We will continue to address barriers to demand flexibility such as smart charging and vehicle-to-grid technology, which allows electric vehicles to feed back into the grid during outages and periods of high demand.

As I mentioned, the scorecard recommended further work on gas appliance phase-out, and now that the government has concluded consultation on this matter, we will be considering further measures to support the gas transition and the phase-out of fossil

fuel gas, which I look forward to everyone in this place supporting.

Access Canberra—Woden—relocation

MS CARRICK: My question is for the Minister for City and Government Services.

Minister, on 20 September Infrastructure Canberra issued a tender for the relocation of Woden Access Canberra into the Woden Library, including design, development, fit-out and relocation works. However, none of the tender documentation is publicly available on Tenders ACT and can only be accessed by prospective tenderers who sign a deed of confidentiality. Minister, were you aware that the tender documentation for this project would be withheld from public scrutiny and only available under a deed of confidentiality? And if so, why was this approach adopted?

MS CHEYNE: I certainly was aware of the tender, and that tender was publicly advertised and notified by the directorate. I will take on notice exactly what information I and my office had received about that, but I would note that this is not unusual, and indeed to receive information about a tender you usually have to have applied and to have an account as a supplier. Automatic access to tender documents is not guaranteed in the first place. I appreciate that Ms Carrick is asking about a level above that, and I will take that on notice and come back.

MS CARRICK: Minister, how can the community's views generally inform the detailed design, as stated by Infrastructure Canberra, when the project's scope has already been developed sufficiently for a design-and-construct tender to be released and the underlying project documentation remains confidential?

MS CHEYNE: Our intention is to consult with the community. We can do both. It is not one or the other.

MR EMERSON: Minister, were other sites considered for the relocation of Access Canberra, such as the existing ACT Health lease at 6 Bowes Street, adjacent to the Services Australia office, which offers a range of services that are directly complementary to Access Canberra?

MS CHEYNE: I will take that on notice.

ACT Health—paediatric services

MR EMERSON: My question is for the Minister for Health.

Earlier this year I received a handwritten letter from an eight-year-old Kurrajong resident named Celeste. She has a port wine stain birthmark and requires regular laser treatments to prevent the development of painful malformations and the need for invasive facial surgery in the future. Canberra's hospitals are not equipped to provide this paediatric laser treatment, so Celeste and her parents, and other families like theirs, have to travel to Sydney regularly for this treatment, which of course is hugely disruptive.

When my office queried why this is not offered in Canberra we were told that while

data on the number of patients referred externally, including to Sydney based providers, is not currently available, clinical advice indicates that demand remains low and concentrated within a very small patient cohort. Minister, if there is no current data on the number of patients referred interstate for this treatment, how does the government know there is insufficient demand for it in the Canberra region?

DR PATERSON: I will take on notice the substantive part of the question, but I think this very much speaks to the motion that was in the Assembly in the last sitting around children receiving very specialised care in the ACT and the fact that the population levels here just do not sustain some of the types of really specialised services that they require. So what we agreed to in that motion was to go away and look at how we can improve the IPTAS program, the patient support program for those children and young people who do have to transfer to Sydney for treatment. I believe there is about 30 young people who do, particularly for oncology and haematology. So the numbers would likely be below that for that particular type of service, but I will take that on notice and see if I can come back with any data for Mr Emerson.

MR EMERSON: Minister, if you do not have that data, can the government please determine the actual number of people in Canberra and the Canberra region public health catchment area that are referred interstate to receive this specialist laser treatment?

DR PATERSON: I will take that on notice.

MS CARRICK: Minister, when will the government start collecting data, such as through the digital health record, on the number of interstate referrals for public health treatments?

DR PATERSON: I will take that on notice, but I think a recommendation of the Walsh Review is to continue to improve the clinical data collection through DHR. DHR has been, as everyone here will know, a very significant investment of the government in our health system and is state of the art technology that facilitates data collection. Part of the Walsh Review recommendations was to continue to refine how we collect data, so this will be a part of that process.

Extreme weather events—domestic, family and sexual violence

MISS NUTTALL: My question is to the Minister for the Prevention of Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence.

Minister, studies have consistently shown that heat results not only in increased emergency department presentations but also in an increase in domestic, family and sexual violence, with the strongest impact on women in households that are already vulnerable. There is roughly four to six per cent more interpersonal violence per one degree Celsius temperature increase. What is the government doing to understand the link between climate-induced extreme heat and increased rates of domestic, sexual and family violence?

MS TOUGH: I thank Miss Nuttall for the question. She has raised a really interesting point. I will take the details on notice. It is a really important correlation and potentially

a causation to note the difference in how climate change affects the entire community, and one of those aspects is family and domestic violence. I will take the substantive part of the question on notice.

MISS NUTTALL: What measures will the government be taking to respond to the expected rise in domestic, sexual and family violence that will occur as a result of the combined impacts of sexism and inaction on climate?

MS TOUGH: I thank Miss Nuttall for the supplementary question. The government is taking a broad range of approaches to how we are dealing with domestic, family and sexual violence here in the ACT. As Miss Nuttall mentioned, there is a variety of causes behind family, domestic and sexual violence. The strategy that my predecessor launched earlier this year was a 10-year plan. The first action plan that is currently underway goes to some of the items that we are doing to try to tackle domestic, family and sexual violence.

Everyone in this chamber would agree that violence is not okay, no matter what the cause and no matter who it is against. This government takes really seriously the work we are doing in that space, from prevention and education through to funding our frontline services. As part of the strategy, we have put quite a lot of funding into establishing our standalone ACCO services for family, domestic and sexual violence. Since coming to this portfolio, I have had the chance to meet with some of those services and find out from the front line what they are doing to work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people within our community in dealing with the unique issues of violence that they have in their community.

The government is putting a lot of work and investment into all the different parts of the ecosystem and is working with the community and the sector quite closely on how we can tackle this insidious problem.

MS VASSAROTTI: How is the government addressing the public health implications of climate-induced natural disasters?

MS TOUGH: Mr Speaker, I want to test the correlation between the substantive question and the second supplementary—

MR SPEAKER: It is a different question. One is about domestic violence; the other is about public health. I think they are questions to different ministers and on different topics. I do not think that it is in order.

Ms Vassarotti: I would note that domestic and sexual violence can be identified as a public health issue, which is where the link is, but I will take your advice.

MR SPEAKER: Given the nature, and that it is a supplementary question, public health is probably something that would be directed to the health minister, and it would need to be treated as a different question in this context.

Crime—offences against the person

MRS MORRIS: Mr Speaker, my question is to the Minister for Police, Fire and

Emergency Services. Minister, you have repeatedly attempted to dismiss community concerns about violent crime as fear-mongering. However, the ACT Policing annual report for 2025-26 shows that crimes against the person, per 100,000 population have again increased. In 2014-15 there were 613 offences against the person, per 100,000 people. In 2025-26 that figure is 906. Minister, why does violent crime against the person continue to increase under this government's watch?

DR PATERSON: I feel like the Canberra Liberals have self-described themselves as fear-mongering. I did not say that. We take very seriously—

Mr Parton: Point of order. The minister has started her answer by debating.

MR SPEAKER: The question is quite specific about the increase, so if you could stick to that, thank you minister.

DR PATERSON: Like the Canberra Liberals, we are very concerned about any increase in crimes against the person. This is exactly why we work very closely with ACT Policing and respond to particular challenges in our community as they arrive.

One particular crime against the person is domestic family sexual violence, and there has been significant reform work within ACT Policing, including a family violence and sexual violence unit, in a new SACA team that was funded in the last couple of budgets. So, we are very committed to addressing the number of crimes against the person, in the ACT.

Mr Cocks: Point of order under 118AA, Mr Speaker. The question was about the causes of the increase. The minister has gone to actions that they are thinking of taking.

Dr Paterson: Family and domestic violence.

Mr Cocks: She has not gone to the question of what is driving the increase.

DR PATERSON: Family and domestic violence.

MR SPEAKER: I will take it on notice, and I will have a look. I am not sure, Minister, that you went to why it has increased. I will have a look at it and get back to the Assembly about whether there is a requirement.

MRS MORRIS: Minister, when will your government admit that its decades-long campaign of starving our police of the tools they need to keep Canberrans safe is resulting in more victims of crime?

DR PATERSON: Well, that is why we have a range of legislation before the Assembly, in the family violence safety notice, in firearms prohibition notices and in a whole range of legislation that we have introduced this term. So, I am really hoping that the Canberra Liberals will support these bills when they come back for debate.

MR MILLIGAN: Minister, are the victims of violent crime and their families fear-mongering when expressing their concerns?

DR PATERSON: No. I have never described them as fear-mongering. Again, the Canberra Liberals seem to be the ones describing themselves and others as fear-mongering. We take—

Mr Cocks: Point of order. Mr Speaker, I believe you've already asked the minister not to debate the question by reflecting on Canberra Liberals' positions. I ask that you direct her to answer the question rather than debating.

MR SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr Cocks. I am sure the minister will do exactly that.

DR PATERSON: Yes. As I said in the Assembly yesterday, we feel very strongly and passionately about supporting victims of crime in the ACT, particularly victims of violent crime, and we will continue to support them.

Firearms—legislation

MR MILLIGAN: My question is to the Minister for Police, Fire and Emergency Services. Minister, in your response to question on notice 1280 you confirmed that ACT Policing cannot readily identify how many firearm offences involved legally possessed firearms compared with stolen or illegal firearms. Minister, has the ACT government undertaken that review or an equivalent assessment to establish the evidence supporting its proposed firearm limits?

DR PATERSON: I do not have the exact question on notice in front of me to speak to that, but I can get that. But, as I have said in the Assembly before, where the limits on the firearms came from was that, after Bondi, the New South Wales government went forward with their limit of four firearms, WA had already undertaken a buyback process and had gone through extensive legislative reform and inquiries, and so we looked at that. We also had multiple discussions with the commonwealth government around the National Firearms Agreement.

Mr Parton: So there is no evidence at all?

DR PATERSON: We have provided the evidence to the Canberra Liberals through the questions on notice and through the inquiry.

Mr Parton: There is no evidence.

DR PATERSON: We have provided the evidence that we have around illegal firearms in the territory.

MR MILLIGAN: Minister, how can the Assembly properly assess whether the proposed firearm limits are necessary and proportionate without evidence showing the risks they are intended to address?

DR PATERSON: ACT Policing does not hold the requested information in a single reportable dataset. The number of recorded incidents involving a firearm broken down by broad offence type is provided in the table on the QON. However, establishing the registration status, the lawful possession, the origin and licensing or court order history on an alleged offender for every single incident over the past 10 financial years would

require the manual review and reconciliation of individual incidents, investigations and firearms registry records.

This is one of the reasons that governments across Australia are investing heavily in a national firearms registry. This work has been undertaken over the last couple of years and has about two more years to develop the firearms registry. That registry will allow governments across Australia to monitor all firearms—registered firearms and interstate use or seizure of firearms. These are some of the gaps in the data that the firearms registry will seek to fill.

MRS MORRIS: Minister, will you consider delaying debate on the Firearms (Public Safety) Amendment Bill 2026 until the government can provide the Assembly with evidence demonstrating that the proposed limits will actually improve community safety?

DR PATERSON: No. We are very committed to the legislation that we have introduced, and we are very committed to participating in the gun buyback.

Extreme weather events—impacts on renters

MS VASSAROTTI: My question is to the Attorney-General. Climate-driven extreme weather events such as extreme heat and bushfire smoke can leave renters as a group particularly vulnerable to negative health impacts. Victoria has committed to minimum cooling standards for rental homes. It means that landlords need to install split-cycle cooling systems in rental properties, reducing renters' risk during extreme heat events.

Has the ACT government done any research into the impacts of extreme weather events on renters specifically?

MS CHEYNE: I do not believe so, but I will happily come back to the Assembly and correct the record if that is not the case. I think I would need to defer to some other portfolio ministers on where some of that research may have been undertaken. In fact, I think a portfolio minister is writing me something right now.

On that, I do acknowledge, however, that there has been considerable improvement in the minimum standards for rental properties, and I do certainly acknowledge that that work has been largely driven by the previous Attorney-General, and I thank him for that.

We are working through the next stage of those reforms, including in relation to minimum standards for rental properties, and expanding those, and what that might also look like for occupancy agreements.

I would note that during the Climate Change Strategy consultation there was input received about rental properties in the changing climate, which we are all experiencing.

MS VASSAROTTI: Do you believe it is fair that renters are more vulnerable to climate-induced extreme weather events than people who own their own homes?

Mr Pettersson: A point of order: it is seeking an expression of opinion.

MR SPEAKER: It is seeking an expression of opinion. It is out of order.

MISS NUTTALL: Attorney, when will the ACT also introduce minimum standards on heating and cooling for rental properties?

MS CHEYNE: I flagged earlier that that work is underway, but I am not going to make an announcement of government policy in the chamber.

Drugs—roadside testing

MRS MORRIS: My question is to the Minister for Police, Fire and Emergency Services. Minister, before the government decriminalised possession of small quantities of drugs ACT Policing warned that roadside tests did not cover all substances being decriminalised. In August, police detected 88 drivers with drugs in their system. Minister, can you please confirm which drugs ACT Policing can currently detect through its standard roadside saliva test?

DR PATERSON: I believe it is methamphetamine, THC and cocaine.

MRS MORRIS: Minister, can you confirm whether the standard roadside test detects LSD or the active ingredient in magic mushrooms?

DR PATERSON: I will say no, and I will come back to the Assembly if I am incorrect on that by the end of question time.

MR PARTON: Minister, you have responded with a no, and I am just asking: are you seriously saying that there is no capacity to test for mind-altering substances like LSD at the roadside?

DR PATERSON: I will take it on notice. I will come back. I should be able to get a pretty clear answer on this one.

ACT Mental Health Month

MS BERRY: My question is to the Minister for Mental Health. Minister, Mental Health Month is celebrated in October. How is the government recognising Mental Health Month this year?

DR PATERSON: Thank you, Ms Berry, for the question. ACT Mental Health Month is one of the most important opportunities that we have each year to bring people together to celebrate recovery and remind Canberrans that they do not need to face challenges alone. It helps raise awareness, reduce stigma and promote mental wellbeing across the community. It also reminds us of the scale of mental ill health in our community. One in four ACT residents experience mental illness each year and almost one in two will experience a mental health condition at some point during their lifetime.

World Mental Health Day, observed annually on 10 October, reinforces this principle. This year's theme, Together We Thrive, reflects a simple but powerful truth: connection

matters. Whether through family, friends, colleagues, community groups or support services, strong connections are fundamental to good mental health and wellbeing.

Throughout October, Canberrans have come together for a range of community events to engage in conversations and support one another and to learn about our services and strengthen community connections. A highlight of the year was the Mental Health Sector Awards on 8 October, which was delivered by the Mental Health Community Coalition ACT in partnership with ACT Mental Health Consumer Network and the Mental Health Carers Voice. The awards recognise the outstanding contributions of workers, volunteers, advocates, carers and people with lived experience who strengthen our mental health system and make a real difference to the lives of Canberrans. I was pleased to attend the awards and hear directly about the dedication of the people working across our sector and the courage of those who share their lived experience to help others. Their contributions make our communities stronger and more compassionate.

MS BERRY: Minister, last week you launched the Peer Pathways program in Canberra Health Services. What is this program and how does it relate to mental health?

Mr Cocks: Point of order. Preamble.

MR SPEAKER: Yes, well, I confess I was not paying as much attention given it was one of the questions from the government. So if you could repeat your question, I will pay much more attention.

MS BERRY: Minister last week you launched the Peer Pathways program in Canberra Health Services. What is this program and how does it relate to mental health?

MR SPEAKER: I have heard a lot worse Mr Cocks. We will let it go.

DR PATERSON: Thank you for the question. I was delighted to launch the Peer Pathways program. We know that while clinical expertise is essential in mental health care, lived experience brings an incredibly valuable perspective, an understanding of what it can feel like to navigate mental ill health, access services and find a pathway towards recovery.

Peer workers draw on these experiences to support others through shared understanding. Sometimes knowing that someone else has been through the same or similar thing can make a real difference. It can help people feel less alone, build confidence, and see possibilities for their own recovery. That is why the Peer Pathways program is so important. The program strengthens the role of peer workers within Canberra Health Services, bringing the expertise of lived experience.

It is being introduced in stages as the program establishes the foundations for the full model. The initial stage, already underway with four full time peer workers, focuses on two low-dependency mental health units across Canberra Hospital and North Canberra Hospital. Peer workers will provide integrated psychosocial, emotional and practical support to support people before discharge and for up to eight weeks afterwards in the community.

Ultimately, this is about recognising that good mental health care comes from more than just one kind of expertise. Their work will help to build a mental health system where clinical care and lived experience work together, where people are supported through the challenges of recovery, and where connection, dignity and hope are part of the care we provide.

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: Minister, how is the government maintaining awareness of the importance of mental wellbeing across the entire year and not just in Mental Health Month?

DR PATERSON: I thank the member for the question. Mental Health Month shines a spotlight on mental wellbeing, but its message extends beyond October. Supporting our own mental health and looking after one another is a responsibility that we all share.

The ACT government works year round to raise awareness, reduce stigma and connect people with support. This includes recognising initiatives such as World Suicide Prevention Day and Perinatal Mental Health Week, which help shine a light on specific challenges and encourage early help-seeking. Just as importantly, maintaining awareness means ensuring that support is available when people need it. We continue to invest in mental health services, community based programs, peer support, suicide prevention initiatives and workforce development to ensure support is available when people need it most.

At the same time, we are embedding wellbeing into government decision-making through the ACT Wellbeing Framework, which guides policy investment and service delivery. We know that mental wellbeing is influenced by more than health care alone. Factors such as housing, employment, social connection and community participation all play a vital role in supporting positive mental health outcomes. We know that prevention, early intervention, mental health literacy and community awareness are key priorities and require a whole of government approach—as is the importance of inclusion, social connection and lived experience—in improving outcomes. Ultimately, promoting mental wellbeing is more than just health services alone. It is building connected communities, supporting families, reducing isolation and creating the conditions to allow people to thrive.

Justice—parole

MS BARRY: My question is to the Attorney-General. Attorney-General, other jurisdictions have far greater transparency around decisions made by their parole boards, including New South Wales, which publishes parole determinations and conditions for offenders. Attorney-General, are the reasons and outcomes of parole hearings by the ACT Sentence Administration Board written down, recorded or published?

MS CHEYNE: I accept the point that Ms Barry is making, that we do need to have a greater level of scrutiny and visibility regarding our Sentence Administration Board. This is something that the new chair of the board and I have been discussing. I will take the detail on notice, as to exactly what is recorded and where it is published. But there is a body of work regarding the modernisation of those procedures, to give effect to the

point that Ms Barry is making. She is not incorrect in raising that question.

MS BARRY: Attorney-General, will the government commit to start publishing written records of decisions of the Sentence Administration Board?

MS CHEYNE: I cannot announce a government policy, but I am certainly happy to keep the Assembly updated as we work through the modernisation of the arrangements of the board.

MR CAIN: Attorney-General, what advice do you receive from the ACT Sentence Administration Board on risk management systems, and how are serious offenders who are granted parole actually supervised when we cannot even electronically monitor them?

MS CHEYNE: Could I seek your advice, Mr Speaker? First of all, there were two questions in that supplementary, and I do not think that the second one is materially relevant to the themes that were being asked about. I would be grateful for your ruling.

MR SPEAKER: Give me a moment.

MR CAIN: I could read the question again, Mr Speaker.

MR SPEAKER: If you could, that would be very helpful, Mr Cain.

MR CAIN: What advice do you receive from the ACT Sentence Administration Board on risk management systems, and how are serious offenders who are granted parole actually supervised when we cannot even electronically monitor them?

MR SPEAKER: You are not meant to ask two questions. There are two distinct questions, in terms of the themes. I think that the advice from the Sentence Administration Board, given that you talked about that in your answer, is in order. So the first part is reasonable, but the second part would constitute a new question and you would want to ask it at a later stage, Mr Cain.

MR CAIN: I will go with the first part, then.

MR SPEAKER: The risk management systems.

MS CHEYNE: I am briefed from time to time about what they are considering and what they are applying. Also, I would refute a suggestion that someone who has served their time after committing a serious crime necessarily remains a high risk to the community. That is exactly what the Sentence Administration Board exists for: to work through what those risks are and to consider an individual's circumstances and the appropriateness of parole.

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

Supplementary answers to questions without notice

Drugs—roadside testing

DR PATERSON: I have received advice that I left MDMA off the list of roadside testing. So, it is cocaine, cannabis, methamphetamine and MDMA. While ACT Policing and the current tests do not test for LSD or other drugs, if police believe that a driver is under the influence, they can request blood tests to be taken. The difference is, if a blood test comes back positive, it is a driving under the influence charge as opposed to an oral fluid analysis charge.

Crime—offences against the person

DR PATERSON: A further matter in relation to correcting the record around crimes against the person. They have actually decreased by 5.5 per cent from the past year, so the self-described “fearmongers” over there might need to self-reflect.

Public schools—funding

MR COCKS: The Minister for Education during her response to one of the early questions made an accusation of spreading misinformation. I understand it is a longstanding precedent in this place that that is unparliamentary language, and I would ask that she withdraw.

MR SPEAKER: It has been withdrawn before but there has not been a specific ruling. Minister, on the point of order?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: If it is helpful, Mr Speaker, I will withdraw.

MR SPEAKER: Thank you, Minister; that is helpful. Mr Cocks, another matter?

Crime—offences against the person

MR COCKS: On another matter, I believe that the minister for emergency services during some of her responses indicated that she had never said that the Canberra Liberals were fearmongering. I would ask that perhaps she go and review her previous statements to avoid misleading the Assembly, given that we have a number of times in which she has used the word “fearmongering” in the past.

DR PATERSON: I will reflect on that and revise my comment to “not used it recently”.

MR SPEAKER: I do not think you can revise comments. I do not think the world works like that—that you can just revise comments.

DR PATERSON: I will correct the record then. I have not described the Canberra Liberals as “fearmongering” recently.

ACT public service—employee found to have engaged in serious corrupt conduct

MS CHEYNE: I want to provide an update and in doing so respond to several of the questions asked of me yesterday concerning Joshua Ceramidas. Mr Speaker, I think it is worth clarifying that ministers are not responsible for, and thus cannot routinely comment on, the private employment circumstances of individual public servants. That

is clear in section 12 subsection (4) of the Public Sector Management Act, which expressly provides that the territory is the employer of all members of the ACT public service, and sections 17 and 18 are also relevant.

It is important that the statutory responsibilities regarding public service employment matters are exercised independently and with proper regard to procedural fairness. And where that extends to us in this place and to all members—not just ministers—is the regard which we should have to continuing resolution 7.

That said, I also appreciate there are occasions when information about an individual's employment can and should be publicly confirmed, but that disclosure should be considered, lawful, and made through the appropriate channels. My comments yesterday were to make clear that there should not be an expectation that ministers will be routinely disclosing individual employment information on demand in the chamber.

Mr Parton: And neither would we expect it.

Ms Barry: Not when there is a finding of serious corrupt conduct—

MS CHEYNE: That is the distinction I have just made. Your aural ability is appalling.

Opposition members interjecting—

MR SPEAKER: Members! The minister is on the floor. Can we listen to the minister, please?

MS CHEYNE: This morning, Mr Speaker, the Acting Head of Service issued a public statement confirming that Mr Ceramidas is no longer an employee of the territory. The Acting Head of Service has also confirmed that the territory is not funding his legal challenge to the ACT Integrity Commission's report. He has also made clear that it would not be appropriate to provide further details about Mr Ceramidas's employment, given pending legal proceedings relating to that employment. I can also confirm that I did receive a request to intervene in the Federal Court proceedings, and I declined that request.

Crimes (Anti-Consorting) Amendment Bill 2026

Mr Parton, pursuant to notice, presented the bill together with its explanatory statement.

Title read by Clerk.

MR PARTON (Brindabella—Leader of the Opposition) (3.03): I move:

That this bill be agreed to in principle.

Every Canberran deserves to feel safe in their home, on their streets and in their community. Keeping people safe is one of the most fundamental responsibilities of government, and sadly, after decades of decline, this is no longer the reality for far too many Canberrans. Today I rise to introduce the Crimes (Anti-Consorting) Amendment

Bill 2026. This legislation is designed to give ACT Policing another important tool to disrupt organised crime and to protect our community.

For more than a decade the Canberra Liberals have warned that ACT Labor's failure to introduce anti-consorting laws, particularly when compared to New South Wales, would make Canberra an attractive destination for outlaw motorcycle gangs. This is not a new issue by any stretch of the imagination. I acknowledge the longstanding advocacy of my colleagues Jeremy Hanson and Elizabeth Lee, who introduced similar legislation in 2024. Their warnings were well-founded. Where we once had an outlaw motorcycle gang operating in Canberra, we now have at least five—at least five.

These outlaw gangs have been identified as among the most serious organised crime threats in Australia, with connections to illicit drug trafficking, firearms and violent criminal activity. Their networks extend across state borders, and they extend internationally. And Canberra's proximity to Sydney and Melbourne, combined with the gaps in our criminal laws, has made the ACT an attractive location for their operations.

Mr Speaker, I cannot overstate that the consequences of organised criminal activity are not theoretical. According to local media reporting referred to in the explanatory statement, six shootings investigated in the ACT during 2026 are believed to have links to outlaw motorcycle gangs. We have seen incidents involving firearms and arson, including attacks where children were present in homes and neighbouring residents narrowly escaped being struck by bullets. These are frightening circumstances for any family. No Canberran should have to live with the fear of being caught in the crossfire of criminal gang activity.

And the concerns about organised crime and intimidation extend beyond our suburban streets. In recent years, serious allegations have emerged nationally concerning the infiltration of the CFMEU's construction branch by outlaw motorcycle gangs, criminal figures and other underworld figures. Here in the ACT, Master Builders ACT has raised longstanding concerns about bullying, intimidation and unlawful conduct in the construction industry. As Master Builders ACT previously stated:

We know our local members have experienced the same illegal activity, bullying and downright thuggery that has been reported in other states on a daily basis.

We have also seen serious questions raised through Operation Kingfisher about union influence over ACT government procurement, including the awarding of the Campbell Primary School modernisation project. These matters reinforce a broader concern: criminal behaviour, intimidation and improper influence must never be allowed to become normalised in Canberra. Whether it is violence on our streets or intimidation in our workplaces, government has a responsibility to uphold baseline standards of community safety and security.

Mr Speaker, the growing presence of outlaw motorcycle gangs is not simply the view of the Canberra Liberals. It is a concern repeatedly raised by our senior police officers. In 2023, the then-Chief Police Officer warned about the growing presence of outlaw motorcycle gangs in Canberra and the potential for increased violence. And more recently, ACT Policing has warned that these gangs are adapting their behaviour to

avoid detection and circumvent existing laws. Gang members are increasingly meeting in public places without wearing their colours. They are changing their tactics, and our laws must keep pace.

In September this year the Chief Police Officer made his position on anti-consorting legislation very clear. He said, “We support that legislation.” He went further. He said:

We’ve seen the benefits of it in other jurisdictions where it has an ability to disrupt associations, or certainly overt associations, and the ability for these people to gather.

Mr Speaker, it is a clear endorsement from the person responsible for leading ACT Policing. It is very clear. Our police know the challenges they face. They understand how organised crime operates, and they deserve laws that help them do their job.

The Crimes (Anti-Consorting) Amendment Bill 2026 is designed to do precisely that. The government should now heed these warnings and the endorsement of ACT Policing and support this important legislation. It targets habitual consorting with convicted offenders, allowing police to intervene before criminal associations lead to further violence and intimidation. Importantly, this legislation includes a wide spectrum of safeguards. An offence can only be established after an official police warning and where a person subsequently consorts with at least two identified convicted offenders, on at least two occasions each, outside specified legitimate circumstances.

The bill protects reasonable contact involving family members, lawful employment, education, health and welfare services, and legal advice. Warnings are time-limited, and the legislation provides for an independent review by the ACT Ombudsman after two years. These safeguards recognise the importance of individual rights while ensuring police have the powers necessary to protect the broader community.

This is not about preventing ordinary Canberrans from going about their lives. It is about disrupting criminal networks, preventing violence and making it harder for organised crime to establish itself in our city. Canberra should never be regarded as a safe haven for organised criminal activity simply because our laws are weaker than those across the border.

We should not be waiting for another outbreak of gang violence before taking action. We have been warned. We have seen the growth in gang activity. And now we have the express support of ACT Policing for this type of legislation.

The Canberra Liberals believe in safer communities, stronger laws and giving our police the tools that they need to protect the public. This bill is a practical and necessary step towards achieving those goals. It sends a clear message to outlaw motorcycle gangs: “Canberra is not open for your criminal business.” I commend the bill to the Assembly.

Debate (on motion by **Dr Paterson**) adjourned to the next sitting.

Government Agencies (Campaign Advertising) Amendment Bill 2025

Debate resumed from 4 December 2025, on motion by **Mr Braddock**:

That this bill be agreed to in principle.

MR BARR (Kurrajong—Chief Minister, Minister for Trade, Investment and the Knowledge Economy, Minister for Tourism and Events, and Minister for Major Projects) (3.11): The Government Agencies (Campaign Advertising) Amendment Bill 2025 is a minor and technical bill. I am advised it does not meet the criteria of a significant bill, so I will address my comments to both the amendments that I have circulated and the bill as a whole.

In developing the response to the bill, a review was undertaken of state and territory advertising guidelines, as well as federal government requirements regarding advertising during commonwealth caretaker periods. The review identified that the legislation in the ACT is a robust framework for ensuring government advertising is consistent with community expectations.

The government's proposed amendments to Mr Braddock's bill seek to support the effective and efficient operation of the bill. Proposed amendment (2) addresses the additional restrictions for government advertising during federal election periods. The proposed amendment seeks to ensure that the act does not impose unnecessary administrative burden, as the territory already has a comprehensive statutory framework that governs and ensures publicly funded advertising campaigns are conducted in the public interest. The appointment of the independent Campaign Advertising Reviewer through the act is the strong safeguard. The government's amendment also clarifies the specific advertising prohibitions during the commonwealth pre-election period to ensure the effective implementation of Mr Braddock's bill.

The government is also, as part of this process, providing a draft update to the Government Agencies (Campaign Advertising) Guidelines, which support the act, for consideration by the Assembly. I can advise the guidelines have been updated to reflect the proposed amendments to the act, as presented by Mr Braddock, and the government's proposed amendment, and support contemporary communications practice. In addition, the government is proposing to oppose new section 17(3)(aa), as this amendment is, in fact, best addressed through updates and clarification in the guidelines that I have just mentioned. And, as part of the updates to the guidelines, a new point 18 has been added to address this proposed amendment.

I thank Mr Braddock and his office for engaging on the detail of the government amendments, and I commend them to the Assembly. I will save time by talking about them in the in-principle stage rather than in the detail stage.

MR COCKS (Murrumbidgee) (3.14): I rise to speak in favour of the Government Agencies (Campaign Advertising) Amendment Bill 2025. This bill makes a number of important changes to the way government advertising is regulated in the ACT. It tightens the definition of political advertising, places stronger restrictions on campaigns promoting proposed policies and programs, strengthens controls during federal election periods, and expands independent review and reporting requirements. Those are the technical elements of the bill, but it is the underlying principle that gives the Canberra

Liberals the greatest reason to support it.

Government communications should exist to inform and engage with Canberrans, not simply improve Labor's electoral prospects. Taxpayers already fund the operations of this Assembly, ministerial offices and the communications machinery of government. They should not then be asked to fund glossy advertising brochures designed to tell them how well the government thinks it is doing and have attached images and names of the ministers who would otherwise benefit. There is a clear line between public information and political promotion, and it is a line that needs to be respected.

There is absolutely a legitimate role for government advertising and communications. Governments need to tell people when roads are closing, when services are changing, when support is available, or how new laws or programs are going to affect them. Emergency information must be able to reach the community quickly. Public consultation processes need to be advertised. None of that is in dispute. The problem comes when government communication moves away from informing and engaging and starts to look more like political promotion.

Our Canberra, or *Our CBR*, is a useful example of how much public money is involved. In 2026, the government budgeted more than half a million dollars to print and distribute just six editions of this newsletter at approximately \$84,000 per edition. That amounts to more than \$920,000 a year, assuming 11 editions. Almost a million dollars of taxpayers' money is spent on a government newsletter. Canberrans are entitled to expect that money to serve a genuine political purpose, not political interests. If a government wants to tell people that a service is available, that is government communication. If Labor wants to tell people how wonderful Labor is for delivering it, Labor can pay for that itself.

This bill strengthens the boundary between those two things. The new definition gives the Assembly and the independent reviewer stronger grounds to scrutinise campaigns that appear designed primarily to highlight government achievements, political figures or party branding rather than provide useful information. Of course, any particular campaign will still need to be judged on its actual content and purpose. This bill does not make every government advertisement inherently political; it just sets a stronger standard.

Public money demands public scrutiny. When governments spend taxpayers' money, they should be able to explain why that expenditure is necessary and what public purpose it serves. That is particularly important when the government of the day is communicating with voters. There will always be an inherent advantage in incumbency. Governments have access to large communications budgets, agencies and public platforms. Rules around advertising, therefore, need to be strong enough to make sure those public resources are not turned into a taxpayer-funded political campaign.

I want to acknowledge the committee work that has been undertaken on this bill. The committee identified a number of areas where amendments may be required to avoid unintended consequences, including protecting emergency communications, ensuring legitimate public consultation can continue, and making sure accessible information is not inadvertently restricted. Those are sensible. The government has indicated and circulated its amendments, but those amendments should not be an excuse to hollow

out the purpose of the bill.

There is little point in strengthening the rules if broad exemptions are written that allow the same behaviour to continue under another name. The stronger prohibition on political promotion is important. There should be clear protections for factual information, genuine consultation and urgent communications, but protections need to be well designed. I am concerned that some of Labor's amendments seem to go towards minimising the additional scrutiny that the bill was trying to introduce.

Scrutiny is not something a government should fear when it is spending public money. If a campaign is factual, necessary and genuinely in the public interest, independent scrutiny should not be a problem. If anything, that scrutiny should strengthen confidence in government communication. The problem only arises when taxpayers are asked to pay for material that is technically presented as public information but, in effect, works as political advertising.

There is a difference between telling Canberrans that a new facility is open and producing advertising whose overwhelming message is that the government deserves political credit for building it. There is a difference between communicating on policy and selling a political agenda. These rules should apply regardless of who occupies government. When the Canberra Liberals form government in the future, the same standards should apply to us. That is what good integrity legislation does. It does not depend on who is sitting on which side of the chamber and it does not depend on who is on the crossbench; it creates a standard for the proper use of public money.

Ultimately, the proposition before us is fairly straightforward: government communications should tell Canberrans what they need to know, not simply promote the interests of the political party that happens to be in power that day. The Canberra Liberals support stronger accountability and independent scrutiny of government advertising. Taxpayers should be confident that, when government spends their money on advertising, it is doing so for them, not for itself.

MR BRADDOCK (Yerrabi) (3.21), in reply: I thank all members for their contributions today. There is a remarkable difference between how this debate has been conducted and what the *Hansard* recorded for the act's original passage in 2009. We are significantly better organised these days, and that is a credit to everyone involved. It speaks to the maturity of this Assembly as an institution and how we have come to terms with a minority government with an active crossbench.

This bill amends one of the most significant pieces of legislation that has been adopted in the ACT in spite of being opposed by the government of the day. The Government Agencies (Campaign Advertising) Act 2009 was opposition legislation that passed with the support of the Greens. It put in place a regime of supervision over the government's advertising activities so as to guard against public funds being used in a way that would serve as a political advantage. At the time, it represented what the Assembly hoped would be a robust and effective system. In quite a few respects, that system has held up well, but about 16 years of experience has revealed some flaws in the scheme. My bill today will help patch them up.

Government advertising campaigns tend to cover three broad categories of activities:

public information efforts, events and newsletters. The third category is of greatest interest in my bill. It involves the dissemination of information to residents about what government programs are being enacted in their area—specifically, the *Our CBR* newsletter, where every monthly edition features a message from the Chief Minister, with his smiling and youthful portrait.

My bill re-examines how party-political purpose is defined. This is a concept that was introduced into the act through amendments during debate in 2009. The definition settled on stated:

... something is party political if it is designed to promote the policies, past performance, achievements or intentions of a program or the government with a view to advancing or enhancing a political party's reputation rather than informing the public.

On its surface, you might think that should rule out having a smiling message from the Chief Minister on the front of the *Our CBR* newsletter. The problem is that, as written, the definition is sufficiently vague that there is room for interpretation within the guidelines. Those guidelines, unamended since 2010, point out examples of circumstances where a concern might arise, and there is a particular carve-out for the depiction of a minister. It reads:

... a Minister (including the Chief Minister) may be named or appear in a campaign provided they are not included excessively in the advertising and promotion. The use of Ministers' names and images should be for the dominant and legitimate purpose of informing the public, discharging the government's responsibilities or communicating a factual message.

These guidelines are a disallowable instrument and therefore have legal standing. The Campaign Advertising Reviewer has quite correctly been reviewing the advertising campaigns in accordance with these guidelines. Nothing in the introduction or passage of my bill should be interpreted as criticism of him and his work.

Our understanding of what is politically beneficial to an incumbent has developed over time. Those criteria may have passed muster in 2010 but do not pass the pub test today. In modern political life, we know that identity and brand recognition are fundamental to political campaigning. Having your portrait on a newsletter sent to every Canberran, regardless of the context, is useful political advertising at taxpayer expense. My bill will bring that practice to an end.

It is also important to note that the act does not constrain media—correctly. Members can still maintain their social media profiles, appear in newspapers and radio interviews and distribute political leaflets; they just cannot have a government agency manufacture it on their behalf, utilising public funds. Provisions for bypassing these rules in the case of a genuine emergency situation or extraordinary circumstances will continue to exist.

The other elements of my bill are the subject of government amendments. They have been consulted on well in advance of today's debate, they have an explanatory statement and they have been presented to the scrutiny committee for checking, and I am happy to foreshadow that they will be agreed to by the Greens today. My bill would prohibit the government from advertising a proposed government program other

than on the basis of conducting consultation. I understand that the government will be opposing this element of the bill but will be updating the guidelines in a way that achieves the underlying objective.

The Chief Minister has made the quite reasonable point that, between the presentation of the budget in June and it being voted on in September, all government programs are, strictly speaking, proposed government programs. I thank the Chief Minister for his signalled intent to share those draft revised guidelines. I look forward to them being notified as a disallowable instrument once finalised. My bill gives the Chief Minister discretion as to when the bill should commence within the next six months, so that these guidelines can be finalised without rushing, if need be.

Lastly, my bill will impose new restrictions during a commonwealth election campaign. While it might be perfectly acceptable to talk about the implementation of a federal-funded program in most circumstances, such advertising becomes politically valuable to the incumbent federal government in the context of a federal election campaign. My bill proposes a system of consultation and veto across the parties in the Assembly. This has been subject to a lot of good-faith discussion over the last few weeks, and I acknowledge Labor's preference for clearer criteria to work with.

The amendments which the Chief Minister will move have been developed with my input and I am comfortable with the alternative approach. What fundamentally matters here is that the ACT government need to keep out of federal election campaigns and will no longer be able to talk up collaboration with the commonwealth on politically-contentious housing programs, as they did in 2024.

I will briefly talk a bit more to the amendments since the Chief Minister has already gone there, in the interest of saving time in the later part of debate. As I flagged earlier, the Greens acknowledge the government's concerns about unintended consequences with respect to the section on proposed programs. In particular, I recognise the concern that the scope of the ACT appropriations bill would capture far more than is intended by my bill. I look forward to examining the new draft guidelines as they reach finalisation and are notified as a disallowable instrument. We will therefore be supporting that amendment.

Moving on to the government amendment on federal campaign periods, as I flagged earlier in this speech, the Greens will be supporting this amendment. This section was originally templated based off the practices of the caretaker conventions, when the government is expected to consult with the opposition regarding decisions that would bind an incoming government. The opposition and parties of the crossbench would have the ability to effectively veto any government advertising campaign during a federal election campaign if they felt it needed to be blocked.

Hearing the government's desire for clearer criteria, on reflection I am comfortable with taking an alternative approach. We learned from the select committee inquiry into the caretaker conventions that the government have an inclination to avoid confronting situations where they might have to consult with the opposition. I can accept it would be better to operate with a system that the government is willing to comply with than one that would require vigilant enforcement from the opposition and the crossbench.

It was at my request that this amendment included criteria for the depiction of a federal MP or candidate, to support the avoidance of doubt and because the definitions for these things elsewhere in the act point to the territory's Electoral Act 1992. Much like the Chief Minister, I too want to avoid a scenario where a large stack of materials has to be pulped for noncompliance. At the same time, with these new criteria, a government which can see a federal election approaching should be able to plan for compliance accordingly.

In closing, I thank the staff in my office, particularly Tim Liersch and Sylvie Robin, for their work on this particular bill. Here on the crossbench, I do not have access to the resources of government departments to assist in the development and refinement of legislation. It is my own staff that have to do all of the policy legwork. The legislative research done by the Parliamentary Counsel's Office is also invaluable and I appreciate the work they did on this bill. For those who do not know, the ACT Greens have a tradition of celebrating each bill we pass with a cake. I look forward to heading upstairs to cut the "Government Agencies (Campaign Advertising) Cake 2026". Thank you, everyone. I commend my bill to the chamber.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Bill agreed to in principle.

Detail stage

Bill, by leave, taken as a whole.

MR BARR (Kurrajong—Chief Minister, Minister for Trade, Investment and the Knowledge Economy, Minister for Tourism and Events, and Minister for Major Projects) (3.31), by leave: I move amendments Nos 1 and 2 circulated in my name together [*see schedule 1 at page 3484*]. I table a supplementary explanatory statement to the government amendments.

I have spoken to the detail of the amendments during the in-principle stage. I feel that I need to make one observation: Mr Braddock's obsession with that photo is greater even than that of my husband. Mr Assistant Speaker, make of that what you want. I am not sure that it is as powerful and influential a photo as has been presented in the debate; nevertheless, it is one for the ages, and it has been one for the ages. I commend my amendments to the Assembly.

MR EMERSON (Kurrajong) (3.32): I want to take the opportunity very quickly to thank Mr Braddock for bringing this bill forward. I think it is a great example of legislation done right—identifying a community concern, preparing a piece of legislation to address that concern, running it through a solid committee process, and working collaboratively across the Assembly to agree on amendments, which we are voting on now, having been brought forward by the government.

I want to thank Mr Braddock and his office for engaging with me and my office to ensure there was support for the final form of the bill that we are passing today. It is an important and appropriate bill to have been developed and passed by this Assembly. Credit goes to Mr Braddock for having driven this piece of work.

Amendments agreed to.

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

Bill, as amended, agreed to.

Domestic, family and sexual violence sector—system mapping

MS BARRY (Ginninderra) (3.34): I move:

That this Assembly:

(1) notes that:

- (a) as part of a broader suite of priorities, the Government promised to undertake updated system mapping of the domestic and family violence sector before the end of 2028, but it is otherwise unclear when system mapping will commence or be completed;
- (b) the Government is yet to complete updated whole of system mapping of the domestic and family violence sector;
- (c) the Government announced in June that it will not implement electronic monitoring of serious domestic violence offenders during this term of government, owing to cost constraints, despite its previous commitment to introducing electronic monitoring;
- (d) frontline services in the ACT have condemned this decision, with one commenting that it has sent a devastating message to victim-survivors;
- (e) it is critical that the Government's 10-year *ACT Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Strategy 2026-2036* and future resourcing is informed by a clear and fulsome understanding of the barriers, gaps and constraints facing the sector;
- (f) despite being a key priority for frontline services, the implementation of electronic monitoring in the ACT was not committed to as one of the 35 actions under the Government's First Action Plan (2026-2028) of the *ACT Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Strategy 2026-2036*;
- (g) if system mapping had been completed before the strategy was developed, appropriate levels of funding could have been earmarked for the implementation of electronic monitoring as promised; and
- (h) system mapping should be given immediate priority, noting that frontline services have testified that they are facing significant constraints, relative to demand, at the hearings of the Select Committee on Estimates 2026-2027; and

(2) calls on the Government to:

- (a) deploy existing funding committed for this work to bring forward and prioritise whole of system mapping of the domestic and family violence sector, under the First Action Plan of the *ACT Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Strategy 2026-2036*, and commence that work immediately in consultation with frontline services, victim-survivors and key stakeholders;
- (b) complete and publicly release the system mapping, including

identification of unmet demand, service gaps, workforce constraints, funding pressures and barriers to accessing support; (c) table the findings in the Assembly within six months, together with the Government's response and an implementation plan outlining how the findings will inform future commissioning, resourcing and delivery of the *ACT Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Strategy 2026-2036*; and

- (d) before the close of the final sitting week of 2026, clarify what measures it will implement this term in place of electronic monitoring to monitor serious domestic violence perpetrators and protect community safety.

Domestic and family violence is an issue that transcends party politics and political punches. I personally believe that issues around domestic, family and sexual violence should be apolitical. We know that, from 2000 to 2022, 12 people in the ACT died at the hands of a domestic violence perpetrator. If anything that I say here upsets anyone who is watching, please, there is help available. We know that, in our city, eight victims of domestic violence have committed suicide over the past 25 years. We know that, nationally, one in five Australian adults have experienced domestic, family and sexual violence.

I do not have to tell anyone here to care more about domestic violence. We all feel the weight of those statistics, and I wish we were not debating this motion today. We likely all know someone personally—a family member, a friend, a real face represented by those statistics. For some of us, that person may be ourselves. For others, it may be someone we hold very dear.

There is nothing that we all want more, and that we should want more, for our city than to see domestic and family violence in a state of continuous decline. It is so grave an issue that it demands nothing less than a unified commitment from us here to work together, to criticise collectively and constructively, and to use the best of what we each bring to the table to find real solutions to the myriad of problems and challenges facing victims of domestic, family and sexual violence and frontline services in the ACT. That is what the heart of this motion is about—effecting real change to the system.

Our role as legislators is to bring the failings of the system into clear focus and to discern what initiatives and funding injections would have the greatest impact on victim-survivors and frontline service sectors. But we cannot do that in a targeted, strategic way if we do not have a detailed whole-of-system map that tells us how the system currently works and the places where it is failing. It should tell us where the key barriers are for victim-survivors trying to access frontline services. It should tell us to what extent services are communicating and coordinating with each other. It should tell us where frontline community organisations are most feeling the strain, and it should allow us to pinpoint precisely where resourcing needs to be injected and redirected.

We are all directly significant when it comes to this work, and funding for domestic and family violence should be a priority. We owe it to the community and to victim-survivors to make sure that it is actually delivering outcomes at the ground level. System mapping is the essential foundation for achieving that. Really, we need that map now. We needed it yesterday. We needed it before the government's 10-year strategic development plan. That is why I am calling for that work to be brought forward, and to

start as soon as possible. The government's sequencing of this issue is not appropriate.

Earlier this year, the government released its ACT Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Strategy, which sets out the course for the government's response to domestic, family and sexual violence over the next decade. Sitting underneath that broad strategy are three short-term action plans which set out the government priorities at each stage. Thirty-five action items are planned for the next two years under the first action plan. One of those actions commits the government to undertake updated system mapping and journey mapping to build a clear, comprehensive picture of our domestic violence system. We do not know when that work is set to commence, and we only know at this stage that it is due to be completed before the end of 2028.

System mapping is just one of 35 action plans that the government has committed to over the next two years. The reason it warrants a dedicated motion is that it is really the foundation of any long-term work or strategic planning over this space in the next 10 years. Having a full, detailed picture of the system, the barriers to services, the pressure points for frontline organisations and the vulnerable cohorts who are falling through the cracks is an essential precursor to an effective long-term strategy. We need to have a clear and detailed picture of the system as it currently operates, shortcomings and all, to target funding and resources in a focused way to the places where it is most needed. In a constrained fiscal environment, that need is dire.

We have seen, just in this past week alone, what happens when we do not have an up-to-date, bird's-eye view of the system and the critical points in need of funding. Headline after headline last week reported the government's decision to shelve its promised rollout of electronic monitoring for serious domestic violence perpetrators. The reason? It will be too expensive. We cannot put a cost on the safety of victims; we cannot.

It will have to wait until next term. This has been a harsh blow to Canberra's frontline domestic violence service operators who were initially consulted on the proposal, and who were given real hope that it would be rolled out—the services who know, better than any of us here, how beneficial this could be for the safety of victim-survivors.

When every other state and territory has already made electronic monitoring available for high-risk domestic violence offenders, of course, our frontline services are going to challenge the decision. Of course, they are going to ask the question: why is it that, in Canberra, of all places, with supposedly the most progressive government in the country, we can't afford this? I cannot blame frontline services for coming out publicly and saying, "The government has put a price on women's safety."

If the system mapping had been completed before the government developed a 10-year strategy and before it created its action plan for the next two years, the government would not be in this position—promising the rollout of a critical measure to protect victim-survivors, and then, two years later, turning around and breaking that promise because the government cannot afford it.

I am not here today to criticise the government. That is not what I am doing. I am putting a solution on the table. Domestic violence is too serious an issue to politicise, as I have said. However, my job, and a shared responsibility of this place, in whichever

aisle you sit, is to scrutinise the government's response to domestic violence, and to genuinely ask ourselves: how can we improve it? Why is it that we are spending so much money, and we are not seeing corresponding impacts? Where is the problem? Where are the touchpoints? Where are the pressure points? How can we effectively direct funding early to those pressure points?

My motion today is not a gibe about the government, although I have done a few of those this week. However, we do require a system map to understand where we can be most effective. It is an attempt to take the first step in bringing our shared response on this issue into clear focus, to transform high aspirations into concrete next steps.

My call today is simple. We need system mapping now. We need it to be completed urgently, so that we can bring the best of our shared knowledge and solutions to bear when it comes to an epidemic that we all want eliminated. It is my hope that these reasonable, modest calls will receive bipartisan support in this chamber. I thank the minister for engaging with my office. I thank the crossbench for doing so as well. I commend this motion to the Assembly.

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) (3.44): I want to start by thanking Ms Barry for bringing forward this motion to the Assembly this afternoon, and to thank members across this chamber and their offices who have worked with my office on my amendments and in broader discussions, noting that my chief of staff and my senior adviser started this week, so it has been a big week for them, in getting across everything and working across the chamber. I wanted to start by saying that.

I do not believe that I would be wrong in saying that the prevention of domestic, family and sexual violence is something that all of us in this place are committed to. While we can disagree on the best approaches to achieve that goal, it is something that is beyond politics, and something I genuinely believe we are all united on in this place. It is in that spirit that I have approached the motion moved by Ms Barry, and I appreciate the reason she has brought forward this motion today. This is an important topic for us to discuss in the Assembly.

Having said that, I cannot agree to the motion as moved by Ms Barry. I am foreshadowing that I have circulated some amendments to the motion. I understand that there are also some other amendments to this motion floating around this afternoon. I have not seen all of them yet, so we will see what happens.

While the motion does come from a good place, it does not accurately represent the current status of work being undertaken in our community as part of the ACT Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Strategy 2026-36. This strategy is a comprehensive strategy borne out of extensive and meaningful consultation with victim-survivors, the domestic, family and sexual violence sector, Aboriginal community-controlled organisations, and other community organisations and government agencies.

It builds on the previous efforts of government and the community sector, and it incorporates the learnings from a range of reports and reviews—the Glanfield review,

the *Listen. Take Action to Prevent, Believe and Heal* report, the SA(P)R report, the *Long yarn*, and the gap analysis report.

The strategy puts in place a framework to work methodically and systematically over the next 10 years. It establishes a framework for three action plans, with clearly defined and measurable actions linked to key outcomes. The first action plan sets out the next two years of work to achieve the outcomes of our 10-year strategy. It details 35 actions across six outcomes to build the foundation for the overall success of the overarching strategy.

This includes actions to undertake updated systems and journey mapping as part of building a comprehensive and shared understanding of current system capacity and functions. This will include the unique and interconnecting system for victim-survivors, children as victims in their own right, and people using violence, and build on mapping work to develop a commissioning roadmap which clearly sets out a preferred future state which may consider access points, service model and service requirements.

All of these actions are integrated with and interdependent on each other, and all of these actions are to be delivered by the end of the first action plan. It is not a simple process to pull out one or two, shuffle them around and re-prioritise. To do so, no matter how well meaning, puts at risk the delivery of the overall strategy and, ultimately, does not help to achieve the end goal that we all so strongly desire, which is the prevention and elimination of domestic, family and sexual violence. It is for this reason that the government cannot support this motion without amendment.

The government does not accept the premise that whole-of-system mapping needed to be completed before the development of the ACT Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Strategy 2026-36 or that, if it had been completed earlier, funding would necessarily have been allocated to electronic monitoring. Ultimately, we cannot agree to bring forward work scheduled to be completed in the next two years to be completed in the next six months.

Working through it in detail, the motion asserts that it is unclear when mapping will be completed when it is quite clear that it will be completed by 2028, as part of the first action plan. The motion asserts that, if mapping had been completed before, it would have informed the strategy, seemingly suggesting that there was a lack of consultation on the strategy.

The reality is that the strategy and first action plan were informed by extensive consultation with victim-survivors, frontline services, peak bodies, advocates and government agencies. I want to thank the previous minister for all her work on this strategy and the first action plan. It also builds on significant engagement undertaken through other major reform processes, including the government's response to *Listen. Take Action to Prevent, Believe and Heal* with respect to victim-survivors, and to support recovery, as well as ongoing work around coercive control reforms, information-sharing reforms, sexual violence reforms, and broader domestic and family violence policy development.

It suggests that the mapping could have informed contracting and funding decisions. However, this mapping exercise is designed to align with current service funding cycles

which conclude in June 2029. It means this mapping exercise will have the most recent and up-to-date information to inform discussions with the sector about service funding in the next funding cycle.

To do this mapping well requires time, commitment and cooperation, not just from government but from victim-survivors and the sector. It is not something to be rushed. Victim-survivors often interact with a range of interconnected systems, including specialist services, health services, housing, child and family services, legal assistance, policing, and the courts. Undertaking a comprehensive and considered mapping process will allow us to gain a deeper and ongoing understanding of the unique experiences of victim-survivors through those systems and helps to inform continuous improvement of the system.

The commitment to system and victim-survivor journey mapping should be understood as an opportunity to continue to deepen and refine our understanding of the experiences of victim-survivors, including how victim-survivors experience multiple systems over time. The Victim Survivor Voices program, led by Women's Health Matters, in partnership with Sisters in Spirit Aboriginal Corporation, will play an important role in supporting engagement with victim-survivors and ensuring their experiences continue to shape reform.

I turn to the issue of electronic monitoring and Ms Barry's comments on that. I acknowledge the broad support for electronic monitoring in the community and note that it has been recommended by four standing committee inquiries. The ACT government remains supportive of electronic monitoring as a community corrections tool and has undertaken significant work to understand how an electronic monitoring scheme could operate in the territory. The work undertaken to date has provided the ACT government with a strong understanding of how an electronic monitoring scheme could operate within the ACT justice system, including implementation costs, risks and supporting service needs.

Feasibility and scoping work for electronic monitoring has included extensive research, market testing and consultation with other jurisdictions, community and government stakeholders and industry experts. Key activities undertaken in the feasibility and scoping work included the completion of an electronic monitoring feasibility study, extensive stakeholder consultation on potential policy frameworks including legal, human rights, police, corrections, DFSV and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander justice sectors, comprehensive market research including through the release of a request for expressions of interest from electronic monitoring providers, engagement with state and territory corrections units that operate electronic monitoring, and resourcing impact analysis for government and community organisations.

It is this work which led us to the decision earlier in the year that it would not be possible to achieve electronic monitoring in relation to domestic, family and sexual violence offenders within this term of government. Experience from other jurisdictions demonstrates that electronic monitoring programs are typically introduced progressively, commencing with less complex cohorts before expanding to higher risk groups, such as DFSV offenders.

ACT stakeholders consistently advised government that domestic, family and sexual

violence offenders should not be the first cohort monitored, citing concerns about victim safety, coercive control, the risk of electronic monitoring creating a false sense of security, and the need for mature risk assessment frameworks, specialist victim supports, perpetrator interventions and reliable real-time response arrangements.

The DFSV sector has consistently emphasised that any scheme would require strong safeguards, appropriate resourcing, victim supports and operational capability to be effective. Consistent with this feedback, the preferred implementation approach was to not commence electronic monitoring for DFSV offenders at this time. However, as I have said, we remain supportive of introducing an electronic monitoring scheme and will continue to work with officials and the community sector on ways we can do that effectively and efficiently.

I also want at this time to acknowledge the significant work of the DFSV sector in working with government on electronic monitoring and the extensive stakeholder consultation they have been a part of. I am sorry they were caught unawares by the government's decision not to proceed to with electronic monitoring at this time. I acknowledge that the work they put in got us to the point of understanding that domestic violence was not the right place to start with an electronic monitoring scheme.

I feel I should also mention some of the significant investments and actions being made by the ACT government in this space. I think it is important to highlight this work in order to assure the community that electronic monitoring and system mapping are not the only thing the ACT government is pursuing. This includes the imminent commencement of the Domestic and Family Violence Information Sharing Scheme, which is a significant whole-of-government reform that will promote information sharing between government and community sector agencies to improve service responses to domestic and family violence and promote the safety of victim-survivors.

The government has allocated \$1.7 million in funding over four years to establish the information sharing coordinator function under the Domestic and Family Violence Information Sharing Scheme. We have invested \$6.7 million in the 2026-27 budget to continue to build a sustainable and effective behaviour change system. This will support Everyman to continue critical programs, such as the Working with the Man and Invitation to Responsibility programs. It also supports the continuation of the DVCS Room4Change program.

We are providing \$6 million over three years to continue domestic, family and sexual violence services provided by Aboriginal community-controlled organisations and to fund a community and professional "violence is not our way" education program. There is an additional \$2.1 million over four years to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander victim-survivors of sexual violence via funding to the ACCOs. These are just some of the many initiatives currently underway.

In closing, I recognise this is a space that we all care deeply about, and I am committed to building consensus across this chamber on tackling domestic, family and sexual violence. My amendments seek a balance between recognising our strong interest and the desire for transparency, without compromising or risking current activities working towards reducing and eliminating domestic and family violence.

I ask the Assembly to support these amendments, in recognition that we have a comprehensive plan which has broad support. I ask the Assembly to work with me on delivering it and not to risk unintended consequences of random and ad hoc changes. It is too important to risk. I seek leave to move the amendments that have been circulated in my name together.

Leave granted.

MS TOUGH: I move:

1. In paragraph (1)(a), omit “but it is otherwise unclear when system mapping will commence or be completed”.
2. Omit paragraph (1)(b), substitute:
“(b) the ACT Government is yet to complete updated whole-system mapping of the domestic and family violence sector. However, the First Action Plan under the *ACT Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Strategy 2026-2036* (‘DFSVM Strategy’) remains on track for completion before the end of 2028”.
3. In paragraph (1)(c), after “introducing electronic monitoring”, insert: “but has made significant investment in frontline support services”.
4. Omit paragraph (1)(d), substitute:
“(d) some frontline services in the ACT have condemned this decision, with one commenting that it has sent a ‘devastating message’ to victim survivors. Another prominent support service expressed reservations about the technology and remained unconvinced it would improve safety if implemented;”.
5. Omit paragraphs (1)(f) to (1)(h).
6. Omit all text in paragraph (2), substitute:
“(2) calls on the ACT Government to:
 - (a) complete and report the system mapping findings including identification of unmet demand, service gaps, workforce constraints, funding pressures and barriers to accessing support, to the monitoring evaluation framework as mandated by the DFSVM Strategy;
 - (b) provide an update to the Assembly by mid-July 2027 regarding the ongoing implementation and progress of the DFSVM Strategy; and
 - (c) continue to explore the viability of electronic monitoring as an integrated option within the community corrections framework.”.

MR COCKS (Murrumbidgee) (3.56): I just want to speak fairly briefly today. I wanted to thank Ms Barry again today for her wonderful work in bringing an important matter to the Assembly for discussion. Sometimes in this place the load of talking about issues that disproportionately affect women falls too heavily on women. I think it is important for the women and men in this chamber to recognise the scourge of domestic and family violence and the impact that it can have and does have on far too many people across our community.

The motion that Ms Barry has brought today I think is very important. I was extremely surprised to hear earlier this year, during estimates, that this work had not already been

done, that the government was pushing ahead with strategies and plans without having the data and the information to actually back it up and make sure investment is going to the right places. That is fundamentally what this is about, because there is still concern in our community about where the money for domestic and family violence goes. I regularly have people raise their concerns with me, people who see the bill that lands in their letterbox attached to the domestic and family violence levy. They want to know that the money is going to the right places, but also they want to know that when someone needs help, when someone is seeking help, they are going to be able to find it, they are going to be able to navigate the services and they are going to be able to get from the doorway to the right service for them. This is exactly the sort of work that Ms Barry is saying should be happening, and it should have really happened by now.

I spent a long time in the public service, and maybe it is the bureaucrat in me but I am a pretty big advocate for evidence-based policy. You cannot do the evidence for the policy after the policy has already been announced. You cannot find the evidence for the policy after you have already made your decision. That is justification. That is why I think the motion brought today by Ms Barry is really important. I know that others will speak to amendments. I just wanted to once again thank Ms Barry for all of her work and her passionate advocacy in this arena, which, as she said, should be absolutely above partisan politics.

MRS MORRIS (Brindabella) (3.59): I want to thank Ms Barry for bringing yet another matter of significant community concern to the Assembly this week, because at the heart of Ms Barry's motion is an effort to ensure a safer Canberra for people at risk of domestic violence. Personal safety is a fundamental right. Everyone has a right to feel safe in their own home, in their workplace and in their community. It is a tragedy that for too many vulnerable Canberrans personal safety is just not a reality.

One of the most fundamental duties of government is to keep the community safe, and this requires evidence-based, methodical and strategic planning and investment across the system. Ms Barry has clearly made the case that at the outset the government has failed to do that and that there is no updated whole-system mapping of domestic and family violence, despite their promise to do so. Sadly, Canberrans are learning the hard way that they cannot always trust this government when they make a promise—promised services that never arrive, a promised ice rink that has never eventuated and, most recently, their promised electronic monitoring ankle bracelets that will now never see the light of day.

In 2024, the ACT government committed to electronic ankle monitoring for violent offenders after a national summit to address what the Prime Minister acknowledged as a national crisis of gender-based violence. Electronic ankle monitoring has been widely endorsed across the community, from policing to frontline services to community advocates and victim-survivors, and it has been rolled out in every jurisdiction except the ACT. It provides real-time geographic accountability for high-risk perpetrators who are in the community on bail, parole or community-based orders. Despite the clear safety benefits that ankle monitoring can deliver—benefits that even this government has recognised—Labor has abandoned its election promise. Law enforcement, frontline services, advocacy groups and victim-survivors believed the government when they made their commitment, and they engaged with them in a lengthy planning process to deliver it. That is further reason why the decision to ditch it is so disappointing.

That decision has been based on and justified by the argument that \$18 million is just too high a price to keep victims safe, to keep people who are vulnerable to domestic violence safe. I believe it was Frances Crimmins from the YWCA who said that the government has put a price tag on women's safety. I think government spending reflects government priorities. They say that \$18 million is too expensive for technology designed to keep victims safe and to deter repeat offenders. I find that really troubling, and I know that so many people in the community find that troubling, because it seems that this government has plenty of money to throw around when it comes to flashy and failed thought bubbles that they have.

There is plenty of money when it comes to a useless multimillion dollar electric fire truck, a multimillion dollar corrupt procurement, a multimillion dollar systems and complexity thinker, \$64 million for a failed MyWay+ system, \$78 million for a failed HR system and the \$2.3 million that is spent every single day on interest on government debt after years of financial mismanagement. This is why it is so important; this is why fiscal responsibility is so important, because without it you cannot deliver the things that the community relies on. When it comes to protecting victims, suddenly this government is not willing to make that investment. There is plenty of money for Labor to throw around on the flashy and failed, while the things that actually make the community safe get dumped.

Many people are concerned that this decision will leave vulnerable women and victims of violence worse off and place increasing pressure on our police and justice system. We cannot afford to take a backward step when it comes to countering domestic violence and keeping the community safe from repeat offenders. To do that we must protect victims and give law enforcement the tools they need to monitor repeat offenders. We must have careful, methodical, evidence-based data and system-wide mapping. That is why I thank Ms Barry for bringing this motion to the Assembly today, and I commend it to the Assembly in its original form.

DR PATERSON (Murrumbidgee—Minister for Health, Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Police, Fire and Emergency Services, and Minister for Gaming Reform) (4.05): I rise to speak today in support of Minister Tough's amendments to Ms Barry's motion. I am very proud of the ACT's 10-year strategy to prevent domestic, family and sexual violence, which represents a long-term commitment to building a Canberra where everyone can live free from violence and feel safe in their relationships, their homes, their workplaces, educational settings and communities. This strategy recognises that responding to domestic, family and sexual violence requires more than just crisis intervention alone. It requires action across the full spectrum: prevention, early intervention, crisis response, recovery and healing. It requires governments, community organisations, institutions and individuals working together to create lasting change.

At its heart the strategy sets out six interconnected outcomes that will guide the work over the next decade. The first action plan outlines tangible priority work, which will be undertaken over the first two years of the strategy, which includes system mapping. Action 5.7 is fundamental to achieving the goals of this strategy. By undertaking updated systems and journey mapping, we will build a clearer, shared understanding of how victim-survivors, children and people who use violence interact with the service

system. This work will help identify gaps and opportunities for improvement, strengthen coordination across services and support more effective person-centred responses. Ultimately it will provide a stronger foundation for system reform and better outcomes across prevention, intervention, recovery and healing. This is why we included it in the first action plan, so it can inform our priorities, investment and focus over the eight remaining years of work under the strategy.

To support these outcomes the strategy commits us to continue building a coordinated, sustainable and integrated service system. Victim-survivors often engage with many services throughout their journey, including health, education, housing, policing and justice systems. Our priority is to ensure these systems work together and respond effectively and place the needs of people at the centre. What system mapping will not do is dictate the implementation of electronic monitoring. Minister Tough has outlined why decisions were made regarding electronic monitoring. As Minister Tough has explained, a staged approach to progressing electronic monitoring is evidence based. Building confidence and awareness in the system is critical prior to moving to electronic monitoring of domestic violence perpetrators.

I also think it is worth reflecting that all the work undertaken to progress coercive control legislation and my engagement with victim-survivors over the years has demonstrated the level of pervasive abuse and the extent that perpetrators will go to to get to victims. Many of those examples that I can think of would not have been stopped by electronic monitoring. I am very supportive of electronic monitoring, but I think we need to be very careful in overstating what it can do. It is literally, purely physically monitoring of an individual. Yet the level of technology-facilitated abuse that is occurring in our community and the sustained and continued surveillance and abuse by perpetrators is also something that we need to have very much at the forefront of work that we do in this space.

Importantly, where a significant part of the focus needs to be in the ACT is improving and expanding our prevention efforts. We know that ending violence requires addressing these underlying drivers, including harmful gender stereotypes and attitudes which play out in insidious ways, including through social media. We want all people to be actively valued and safe. Respectful relationships are key and critical, and we need to play a role in creating a culture where violence is never tolerated. This work will be guided by principles of collaboration, equity, accessibility, accountability, lived experience and evidence-informed practice. We will measure our progress and learn from what works and adapt where necessary to achieve better outcomes.

Ending domestic, family and sexual violence is a whole-of-community responsibility. The ACT government is committed to providing leadership, driving reform and supporting evidence-based programs to promote safety. I look forward to supporting Minister Tough's work in this portfolio and continuing to champion a Canberra where every person is respected, every person is protected and every person can live free from violence.

MS CASTLEY (Yerrabi) (4.11): I have to say that I find motions like this really frustrating. Everyone in this place knows my history on coercive control and domestic violence, both as someone who has experienced it and someone who has been an advocate for reform. I know as well as anyone here that there is so much more that we

could be doing. If I had a dozen motion spots, I could fill them with a different reform that could make a difference to the lives of Canberrans who experience or are at risk of experiencing domestic and family violence. It frustrates me when I see a motion on domestic and family violence that does not try to put good, new ideas on the agenda or help make the case against ineffective ideas but really just asks the government to do what they are doing already but faster. I understand the frustration with how long things take. It is a frustration for me as well, but I honestly doubt that the government is slow-walking on action for domestic and family violence.

The most compelling part of the motion is the passing reference to electronic monitoring. Back in June the government broke their promise on this commitment. The decision itself was outrageous, but the sneaky way it was announced was simply gutless. It was a complete dodge.

Dr Paterson: I announced it in the chamber in front of all of you.

MS CASTLEY: Correct—in a one line. It was to dodge the scrutiny that was warranted—

Dr Paterson interjecting—

MS CASTLEY: that the then minister obviously knows, as she is interjecting while I am speaking now, that she should face. I believe it was contrived for her to avoid scrutiny. I acknowledge we have a different minister now, who has briefed me on the issue and I hope will provide me more information shortly. It is certainly something that we could be debating in much more detail and to make much more use of the Assembly's time.

Alternatively, we could be debating something like Clare's Law. It is a reform that would allow people who are seeing red flags in their partner to access information about whether that person has been charged or convicted of DV offences, whether they are subject to family violence orders and whether they are currently on bail or parole.

Another option would be reforming the enforcement and consequences of FVO breaches. FVOs should be a tool that helps keep Canberrans safe from violent partners, but too many feel like it is just a piece of paper that will not protect them or has not protected them in the past. Still on FVOs, another option would be to allow digital applications and remove hearings. It is incredible that a person can only make applications in person unless they receive special permission from the courts in advance. This change would help make FVOs more accessible to the people who need them by reducing the need for them to take time off work or arrange child care, especially when an order is needed at late notice, as is often the case.

A fourth option might be to build on the death review and improve our understanding of when and why people are misidentified as the primary aggressor to help stop that happening in the future. This is really vital work if we want to protect true victims of domestic and family violence.

Finally, we could implement regular, transparent evaluations of our different domestic and family violence policies and programs. Right now we do not have a strong

understanding of which programs are working and which are not. We are almost certainly putting money into places when it could be used more effectively elsewhere. We should be building an evidence base to make more-informed decisions about where public funding goes.

Those are five practical, feasible and proven reforms which have not really been debated in this place, each of them something which could help improve the safety or experiences of people exposed to domestic violence in the ACT. Those are the sorts of the debates we should be having, and I hope that these are debates we have in the future.

I understand there are a number of amendments circulated. I would like to thank the minister's office for her engagement with me on their amendment. I understand that it is just cleaning up some things in the motion. Mr Emerson's amendments look fine. I appreciate him chatting to me about those earlier as well. There is a Greens amendment here that I will not be supporting. I think we need more information to understand and force the government to recommit to something until we all have the full picture. Thank you, and I look forward to seeing how this goes.

Ms Tough's amendments negatived.

MR EMERSON (Kurrajong) (4.16): I want to thank Ms Barry for bringing this motion to the Assembly today. As has been reflected in the remarks of multiple members, this is an issue that touches every corner of our community, and we often return to it. I think that, despite the disagreements that we have along the way, it is encouraging to see members from across the chamber engaging so actively on this matter. We always get multiple contributions when we return to this place to talk about gender-based violence.

While I acknowledge that the minister and her office have inherited legacy work in this portfolio, including the DFSV strategy, which was already underway when she took office, I do take the point that Ms Barry is putting forward in this motion today that the sequencing of the system mapping, being planned after the commencement of the strategy rather than having informed the strategy, does seem off, and it is a missed opportunity for this important information to shape the direction and funding decisions in this portfolio.

System mapping, of course, tells us where the shortfalls are, where demand is outstripping supply, and where services are overlapping or missing altogether. Without it, we risk making funding decisions based on guesswork rather than evidence. Surely, a strategy should be guided by a system map that shows us where more investment is needed. Surely, that mapping is a prerequisite for writing and implementing an action plan in the first place, not something we get to at the end. I am appreciative of Ms Barry's intent to get this important work completed in a timely manner.

We know that the domestic, family and sexual violence services sector, and the service sector more broadly, is crying out for more funding. Of course, a system map is not going to answer the phone at 2 am, but the two are not in competition. Good mapping is what helps us make the case for frontline funding and make sure that it goes where it is needed most. This is something that came up during our recent estimates hearings, on the community day, when multiple witnesses during the session on this matter were asked, "What is the funding gap? What do we need to do to get DVCS able to answer

all phone calls, and not have to turn down 50 per cent of them?” We heard that, for instance, the Canberra Rape Crisis Centre think they are 40 per cent underfunded.

These service providers have not had the capacity to do that mapping work to understand what is actually required to address the gaps. This is the work of government, and this is the mapping that we are talking about.

I will be supporting Ms Barry’s call for the completion date for that exercise to be brought forward. However, noting government concerns that the proposed timeframe of six months may be too tight, and in pursuit of a high-quality piece of work, the amendment I have circulated gives them 12 months, rather than the six months proposed in the original motion.

On electronic monitoring, I understand—despite what has been reported—that cost may not, in and of itself, be the primary barrier here. I also acknowledge and thank the minister’s office for their offer of a briefing on the policy change on electronic monitoring. Unfortunately, though, as of this debate, I have not yet received the information that informed the government’s decision on this, and we have to vote today.

I want to know—and this is reflected in the amendment that I have circulated—what the real barriers are to implementing a policy which was committed to both by the ACT government and by national cabinet. Is it the technology, the legislative framework, the resourcing needed to monitor alerts and respond to them, or the scope of the use of the system?

I look forward to a full briefing from the minister’s office to better understand the complexities of implementing a system like this. If economies of scale are a concern, exploring its use across other areas makes a great deal of sense, and I note this is part of what Ms Vassarotti’s amendment proposes.

We also need to compare the cost of incarceration with the cost of running an electronic monitoring system, to know whether deciding against introducing such a system is not a cost-saving measure but a cost-shifting one. We know how expensive incarceration is, and we know the benefits of keeping people out of prison and in our community when it is safe to do so—so that offenders can maintain employment, family connections and access to rehabilitation programs, without sacrificing the safety of victim-survivors. For victim-survivors, a well-run monitoring system can, of course, offer an added layer of safety as well.

I hope the information I have called for in my amendment will increase the transparency for our community, for the sector and for the Assembly, and to shape our future decisions on this matter. Ultimately, it is clear to me, when we debate this, that everyone in this chamber wants the same thing: for every Canberran to feel safe. Getting there means knowing where the gaps are, being clear about how and when they will be filled and being open to every tool that could help along the way.

I note that, although the amendment has been circulated late, I would rather do intentional ambushes than accidental ones. But this is not an intentional ambush. Everyone has seen my amendment at the same time. There is just a lot to work through here. Despite it being messy, in the end, I think the engagement that has happened along

the way has been really constructive. I want to thank Ms Barry and her office for engaging on this, the minister and her office for engaging with my team throughout the day, and Ms Vassarotti as well, and Ms Carrick and Ms Castley for our conversations on this.

Hopefully, the final version gives us all a little bit of what we want. I want to communicate that it is intended to be constructive, despite it having been a little bit messy at the end, with all the different amendments and revised amendments.

I move:

Omit all text in paragraph (2), substitute:

“(2) calls on the Government to:

- (a) develop and table in the first sitting week of 2027 a detailed feasibility assessment covering:
 - (i) the roll-out of electronic monitoring for domestic violence offences;
 - (ii) the roll-out of electronic monitoring for community-based orders; and
 - (iii) the cost of incarcerating offenders who may have otherwise been subject to electronic monitoring under paragraph (2)(a)(i) and (ii);
- (b) bring forward and prioritise whole-of-system mapping of the domestic and family violence sector, under the First Action Plan of the *ACT Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Strategy 2026-2036* and commence the work as a priority in consultation with frontline services, victim-survivors and key stakeholders;
- (c) complete and publicly release the system mapping, including identification of unmet demand, service gaps, workforce constraints, funding pressures and barriers to accessing support; and
- (d) table the findings of the service mapping within 12 months, together with the Government’s response and an implementation plan outlining how the findings will inform future commissioning, resourcing, and delivery of the *ACT Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Strategy 2026-2036*.”.

MS VASSAROTTI (Kurrajong) (4.22): I rise to speak to the amendment that has been circulated in my name. Firstly, I want to thank Ms Barry very much for bringing this motion to the floor of the Assembly. A number of us have noted that it is really heartening to see that there is strong engagement across the parliament on these issues. That is vitally important, and I thank everyone for their engagement.

I want particularly to take this opportunity to talk about electronic monitoring, especially in the context of family, domestic and sexual violence, which is the substance of the amendment that I have circulated. When it comes to electronic monitoring, the Greens are broadly in agreement with the Liberal Party, many in the family violence services sector and many in the community. Our position is that the use of electronic monitoring in our justice system has the potential to be very beneficial. It has the potential to reduce incarceration and support pre- and post-incarceration sentencing options. It also has the potential to improve the safety of victims and potential victims,

particularly of family and domestic violence. If used, it should be done in conjunction with appropriate wraparound services.

While recognising the comments made by the minister in the debate today, it is very disappointing that the government has said it has abandoned the idea of electronic monitoring, as has been recently reported. If the government abandons electronic monitoring, it is, again, a broken promise from the Labor Party. The Chief Minister had been very clear that the government was going to introduce electronic monitoring. There are numerous statements on the public record.

According to the Chief Minister in 2024, it was to be introduced in the ACT “certainly within the space of months, not years”. Issues with the ACT’s size and scale of potential use were acknowledged, and they were not a deterrent when this commitment was made. As the Chief Minister pointed out, “Another small jurisdiction, Tasmania, has recently completed a trial and potentially a partnership with New South Wales could make sense as well.” Mr Barr said the decision was made. He said, “So there’s a technology and procurement decision ahead but I guess the threshold issue of when do we intend to proceed has been largely resolved, yes.”

I recognise that being in government is a complicated and challenging job, but it is, unfortunately, a fact—and not a pleasant one for government—that it made this commitment to electronic monitoring very clearly and publicly, and now that commitment has been broken. I made a similar point yesterday, in relation to the shutdown periods for poker machines. In that case, the government committed publicly to implementing a pokie shutdown between 2 am and 10 am. Yesterday, it tabled a regulation that walked back that commitment. To be frank, the government need to stop breaking these commitments, and we will call them out when they do.

I also want to emphasise the important historical context of the electronic monitoring promise, because it is very important, especially when we are talking about family and domestic violence. The Chief Minister initially made the commitment to electronic monitoring in the context of an urgent national cabinet meeting on gender-based violence, convened by the Prime Minister in 2024. The meeting was held in the context of the shocking statistics on gender-based violence that are a national tragedy in our nation.

I made some comments in the chamber yesterday about the seriousness of sexual violence and violence against women. Family and domestic violence is also a serious social and public health challenge, and one that is related to, and overlaps with, sexual violence. Nationally, more than one in four Australian women have experienced family or domestic violence since the age of 15, according to the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. The most extreme result of family and domestic violence is homicide. In Australia, taking 2024-25 figures, one woman is killed by an intimate partner every 11 days, on average. It is shocking, utterly unacceptable and it demands action.

National cabinet convened and agreed that gender-based violence was a national crisis. The goal of that meeting was to accelerate action to end gender-based violence in a generation. The Prime Minister stood with all state and territory ministers and said that all levels must do better. He said that governments need to be accountable. It was off the back of that meeting that the ACT promised to progress electronic monitoring. It

was noted that we are the only jurisdiction not using the technology. The Chief Minister and the government were very firm that they would do it.

A cynical observer would look at the lack of action since that meeting and the abandonment of that commitment and say, as we have seen so many times before, that promises and statements were made to try and appease political risk but follow-through action was not taken. It is a pattern that advocates in the sector find extremely frustrating. Meanwhile, this national crisis of gender-based violence continues. The violence and the deaths continue. We need to call out this broken commitment and lack of action.

I have circulated an amendment that calls on the government to recommit to progressing electronic monitoring in the ACT justice system, in line with the government's commitments in 2024, for people on pre- and post-sentencing community-based orders, including domestic and family violence perpetrators, and it asks them to report back to the Assembly on progress on implementation in the first sitting week of 2027. I recognise that this position is different from what has been previously reported, and I hope there will be the ability to recommit.

On the remaining components of Ms Barry's motion, I emphasise the importance of a well-funded and effective family and domestic violence sector. They are struggling, and it is critical that we get the system mapping done as soon as possible, so that it is clear where funding needs to go to have the very best impact. On that basis, the Greens will be supporting the amendment circulated by Mr Emerson. I move the following amendment to Mr Emerson's proposed amendment:

"Add:

(3) also calls on the Government to:

(a) recommit to progressing electronic monitoring in the ACT justice system, for people on pre- and post-sentence community-based orders, including domestic and family violence perpetrators; and

(b) report back to the Assembly on progress on implementation in the first sitting week of 2027.".

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) (4.30): I want to speak briefly to the two amendments, from Mr Emerson and Ms Vassarotti, and thank them both for moving the amendments and for their engagement with me and my office on those amendments this afternoon.

The government can support both amendments. I appreciate the work with both members to change some wording in each amendment to make them more palatable for the government to support. I appreciate Mr Emerson finding the middle ground. Six months is not doable for us to bring that work forward, but we can live with 12 months.

I also acknowledge Ms Vassarotti's suggested changes. As my amendments that have

been circulated show, I am quite open to exploring electronic monitoring in community corrections, as a community corrections tool. I have put on the record that we cannot start with family and domestic violence, but I do see a world where we can work up to that point. I am very open to exploring electronic monitoring, and I can support the revised amendment.

I want to put on the record, though—and I told Mr Emerson I was about to say this—that I did not see Mr Emerson’s amendment until we were debating it. I was aware that Ms Vassarotti’s amendment was coming, although not until quite late. It is extremely frustrating not to have amendments or know about their existence until we are already debating the motion in the chamber. I appreciate that everyone saw the amendment at the same time. There have been discussions about Ms Barry’s motion for the past day, with Ms Barry’s office, my office and offices across the Assembly. It was quite frustrating not to know that the amendment was coming until the last moment. In saying that, though, we can support both amendments.

MS BARRY (Ginninderra) (4.32): I will speak to the amendments and in closing. We are supporting Ms Vassarotti’s amendment, as well as Mr Emerson’s amendment. I want to thank all the members that have contributed to this debate. It is quite comforting to see that all of us in this place have a shared goal of preventing domestic and family violence, and I think it is really important to highlight that.

I want to speak briefly to Mr Emerson’s amendment, which I have just received. We are supporting it. While I have just received the amendments, I think the extension of the motion’s timeframe from six months to 12 months is reasonable. I think this needs to be done, but it needs to be done well. It also gives the government the capacity to be able to adjust resources and shift workload. We are happy with that.

I think that the amendment relating to electronic monitoring devices actually strengthens the motion. Also, the government’s comments about electronic monitoring make this amendment quite important. The AFPA have said that the cost benefit to having electronic monitoring is quite significant. It is better to have it, because the cost benefits backs it up. They have made those comments, and we agree that perhaps there needs to be something on the table so that we can all identify what the cost benefit is.

At the core of the government’s statements—and I appreciate that the minister has only just taken on this portfolio—there were two contradicting statements. The first, as we know, was that the government announced that it would not be going forward with electronic monitoring because it was too expensive, but today—and I think yesterday, during question time—the minister said they would not be going forward with electronic monitoring because the sector had said that DFSV was not the right place—if I am verballing you or misquoting you, please correct me—to start electronic monitoring.

My understanding is that the government committed over \$600,000 to do some study on the feasibility of electronic monitoring. I would have thought that the sector would have been engaged in that, and that it would have been identified then that the domestic and family violence space was not the right place to start electronic monitoring. The announcement would then not have been made, and the sector would not have wasted their time doing all of that consultation work; yet this is where we are today.

We do know that the sector is stretched. It is doing a lot of work. Frontline services are stretched to the limit. Asking it to consult on something and then realising, “Oh my goodness, we didn’t get it right,” is quite concerning. It shows an absolute disregard for the sector and the contribution it makes in this space. That is why I do not think we trust the government, based on their amendments, when it says, “Trust us, we’ll get it done.” I do not think we trust it to get anything done, which is why we want to see this plan brought forward.

Ms Vassarotti’s amendment is quite sensible. The government needs to recommit to electronic monitoring. As I said, the AFPA have said, “We’ve actually not even seen what the cost benefit is.” The government should undertake that work and recommit to electronic monitoring. I think that is quite important.

We know that it is not the be-all and end-all. We understand that perhaps domestic and family violence is not the right place to start, but we want to see the evidence. The government have committed to it. They have done the work on the feasibility study. We want to see the evidence moving forward. Most importantly, we want electronic monitoring in the ACT. Other jurisdictions have it. There is no reason why we should not have it as well.

The government’s amendments really add nothing to the motion. They do not commit to anything. They do not commit to a timeline. They just say, “Trust us, we’ll do things the way we’ve been doing it. We know what the sequencing is. We know it’s part of the work that we’ve undertaken or committed to undertake. We will deliver by 2028.” I do not think that I trust the government, as I have indicated, to deliver on anything.

I do understand that domestic and family violence is a complex space; I get that. I have worked in that sector for 10 years. But it is really important that, when a government makes a commitment, it follows through with the right evidence, and that is what we are asking it to do today.

Once again, I thank members for their contributions, and I commend the motion to the Assembly.

Ms Vassarotti’s amendment to Mr Emerson’s proposed amendment agreed to.

Mr Emerson’s amendment, as amended, agreed to.

Original question, as amended, resolved in the affirmative.

Legislative Assembly—Standing order 118AA

Speaker’s ruling

MR SPEAKER: Before we go to 90 second statements, during question time today Mr Cocks raised a point of order under standing order 118AA suggesting that the Minister for Police, Fire and Emergency Services was not responsive to Mrs Morris’s question. The question was:

Minister, you have repeatedly attempted to dismiss community concerns about

violent crime as fearmongering. However, the ACT Policing annual report for 2025-26 shows that crimes against the person per 100,000 population have again increased. In 2014-15 there were 613 offences against the person, per 100,000 people. In 2025-26 that figure is 906. Minister, why does violent crime against the person continue to increase under this government's watch?

I would agree that the minister's answer at the time could very well be ruled as not responsive, but I note that during matters arising, Dr Paterson told the Assembly that crimes against the person had fallen in the last reporting year, which would appear to be a direct response. Therefore, there is no requirement for a 118AA response.

Statements by members

Disability support services—SeeWay program

MR CAIN (Ginninderra) (4.39): Last week I had the great pleasure of meeting with representatives of Guide Dogs NSW/ACT to talk about the launch of their new program called SeeWay, a free national service for Australians with moderate low vision. SeeWay supports an estimate of 70,000 Australians who often fall through the gaps in disability support services. It is a one-stop online companion providing immediate early-stage support at a critical time, particularly following diagnosis of an eye condition. The service helps people adjust to vision loss, build their confidence, access practical assistance and engage in employment and community life.

This new service, SeeWay, from Guide Dogs NSW/ACT, is built around three pillars of support. Firstly, regarding information, it has accessible, reliable guidance for people with low vision and their families, including resources on eye conditions, practical strategies, client stories, links to organisations such as Macular Disease Foundation Australia, Glaucoma Australia and Guide Dogs.

Secondly, it provides digital skills training—online training support for people to confidently use technology—covering accessibility settings, online safety, social media apps, both self-paced and small group enabled learning, and mental wellbeing support for people going through a significant challenge in life. I want to commend Guide Dogs NSW/ACT for the briefing and for this new program called SeeWay. Thank you, Mr Speaker.

Government Agencies (Campaign Advertising) Amendment Bill 2025

MISS NUTTALL (Brindabella) (4.41): I would like to congratulate my colleague Mr Braddock for passing a bill. I believe the former Attorney-General mentioned that we have a bit of a tradition in our office of bill cakes. This one was really cool! It was purple with a little bit of gold sparkles. Thank you all for your time.

Discussion concluded.

Adjournment

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

That the Assembly do now adjourn.

Women—violence against women

MR PARTON (Brindabella—Leader of the Opposition) (4.42): We have had a number of speeches made—and I know there is one coming from Ms Stephen-Smith, on the Raise Our Voice in Parliament scenario. I have got one of those, but it is not from that program. It is from Lara, who is a mum in Tuggeranong, who wrote to me overnight with a full-on rant. And she specifically said, “Please, if you would like to share this in the chamber, do so.” Lara says:

I am a single mum with a 14-year-old daughter who lives with me. In the last three years she has been followed by two different adult men in their forties, when walking home from school in the Tuggeranong area. Yes, I have made various police reports. Since then, I have changed my work hours to ensure that I pick her up from school in the afternoons and drop her off to the bus stop in the mornings.

Four years ago, I myself was followed by one of the men who followed my daughter. The same man also followed one of her friends who lives in the area. Yes, I have made contact with police again and was able to make a police report.

If, on the odd occasion, my daughter has to walk home from school, she now carries a key safety alarm, a phone in her hand and insect repellent—as pepper spray is not legal. I wish it was. She looks back continuously on her way home. On the odd occasion when she is walking home and I am stuck at work, my anxiety is high, I do not have peace during that shift. All I am thinking about is her safety and praying that she is safe and protected.

In the last few years, young people appear to be more out of control; stealing openly in shopping centres; youths using e-bikes as intimidation on footpaths or in the main streets of Tuggeranong to scare all people, including the elderly; youths vaping; not attending school; youths initiating fights or screaming near cafes and restaurants.

There is more violence against women. There are more stabbings. There are more families struggling financially, and I imagine this puts pressure in the family home which would result in more violence towards women and children. Working Australians and working Canberrans are struggling for food and the basics.

I used to allow my daughter to sometimes go to the shops with a couple of girlfriends after school but now I do not even allow her to do this. It feels unsafe for young girls to even attend the shops. There are other girls who are older who come across as intimidating to a 14-year-old in any major shopping centre.

Respect has gone out the window. Many youths have school avoidance. My daughter likes school and has some lovely friends, but there are so many who just do not go.

And then, of course, there is the bullying, which does not stop at school, but it continues online. A lot of it is subtle and used as intimidation, as a form of bullying. Phones are technically not allowed to be used in schools, but most kids still do, and frequently use them in the classroom right in front of teachers.

We live right near a nice pond in the Tuggeranong area and what is sad is that

I cannot say to my daughter anymore, “Just go for a walk to look at the ducks. Get some sun, enjoy nature for a bit.” Yes, she could do it, but not alone and that is so sad.

Our justice system is appalling. I am disgusted with the many judges and magistrates not doing their job properly. Our justice system needs a complete overhaul.

My point with all of this is it no longer feels safe. I feel sorry for my daughter and the generation after her. Help us fix this.

That, Mr Speaker, is from Lara; that is the feedback that we are getting on the streets all the time. And I think it is exceptionally important that it is communicated in this Assembly because there are a hell of a lot of Canberrans who are fed up with what is going on there, and they are looking for an improvement in the way things are rolling out.

Youth—careers

MR CAIN (Ginninderra) (4.45): I wish to read a speech from a work experience student who joined my office in late September. Karamveer from Melrose High School is a year 10 student. He has titled his speech, *Confusion in life and choosing a career*. I hope you are all listening. These are the words of Karamveer:

Today, I would like to speak about an issue that almost every person experiences at some stage of life: uncertainty about the future and the challenge of choosing a career. From a young age, we often ask the question, “What do you want to be when you grow up?” At that age, our answers are usually simple and confident. We may say that we want to become a police officer, a doctor, a professional athlete, or perhaps something entirely different. At the time, we do not necessarily consider all the responsibilities, challenges and decisions that come with such a choice.

However, as we grow older, the situation becomes considerably more complex. When we reach high school, we are introduced to a wide range of subjects, career pathways, universities, apprenticeships and employment opportunities. We suddenly realise that there are thousands of different directions our lives could take.

Although having many opportunities is a privilege, it can also create uncertainty and confusion. We may begin to ask ourselves, “What if I choose the wrong career? What if I am not good enough? What if I change my mind in the future?” These are certainly reasonable questions. It is important to recognise that uncertainty about the future does not mean that we are failing. Life does not always follow the plans we make when we are young.

As we gain experience, we may discover new interests, develop new skills or realise that the ambitions we once had are no longer the ambitions we wish to pursue. Some people may have a clear understanding of their career aspirations from a young age, while others may require many years to discover what they truly wish to do. Neither path is necessarily wrong. Even as adults, people can experience uncertainty about their careers. An individual may spend 10 years in one profession before deciding to pursue a completely different direction. Another

person may lose their employment, establish a business, return to education or discover a passion that they had never previously considered.

This demonstrates an important point. Choosing a career does not necessarily have to be a once-in-a-lifetime decision. We sometimes imagine life as a straight road, where we must choose one direction and remain on that path forever. The reality is life is more than a journey; there will be turns, challenges, unexpected opportunities and perhaps and detours along the way. Therefore, it is perfectly acceptable not to have everything figured out. It is acceptable to change our minds. It is acceptable to take a different path from our friends and classmates.

What truly matters is that we continue to learn about ourselves, explore different opportunities, seek appropriate advice and make decisions that reflect our own interests, abilities, values and goals. Our future is not determined by a single decision, rather it is shaped by the many decisions, experiences, challenges and opportunities we encounter throughout our lives. So, if you are currently uncertain about your future, remember this: you do not need to know the entire journey today; you only need to take the next step. Thank you.

And these were the words of Karamveer, a year 10 student from Melrose High School. Very sage and wise words indeed.

Youth—Raise Our Voice in Parliament

MR STEEL (Murrumbidgee—Treasurer, Minister for Planning and Sustainable Development, Minister for Heritage, and Minister for Sport and Recreation) (4.49): This speech was submitted by Hunter from my electorate of Murrumbidgee, as part of the Youth Voice in Parliament Week, supported by Raise Our Voice Australia.

Hello, my name is Hunter. I am 12 years old and I am writing this letter in hopes of a better future for the LGBTQIA+ community. There is a negative view towards the LGBTQIA+ community, which can lead to discrimination and unequal opportunities. Did you know that two in three people in the LGBTQIA+ community experience homophobia?

I sadly, have been personally affected by homophobia. How would you feel if you were bullied for who you are, and felt like you had to hide? It is a sad truth, but the government can help.

They can help in many different ways. They could introduce a new bill to update curriculums in schools across Australia. They could fund organisations that support the LGBTQIA+ community, or make strict laws against hate crimes.

It can be hard to stop this, but together we can make something big. Something we could do—a step we need to take—is to address that homophobia is bad. The government could fund an ad campaign to address homophobia using phrases like “love is love” or “being gay is okay”, then put posters or billboards up of those phrases so that inclusion is normalised. Kind regards, Hunter.

I want to acknowledge the bravery and strength that Hunter has shown by putting these words to paper. Standing up for yourself and others is an admirable trait, regardless of your age. But to take it to a step beyond that and to think of ways to actively change behaviour and combat homophobia is very impressive. I agree with Hunter;

governments absolutely have a responsibility to help Canberrans live their lives free of discrimination and hate. There is active work underway on this at the moment.

Hunter, you are an exceptional young person, this speech reflects that, and it was a privilege to read it into the Hansard.

Youth—Raise Our Voice in Parliament

MS CARRICK (Murrumbidgee) (4.52): This speech was written by a young person from my electorate of Murrumbidgee, as part of the excellent Raise Our Voice in Parliament campaign.

Hi, I am Jai. I am 13 years old and I am from the Murrumbidgee electorate. I am going to be talking about a problem that is impacting young people and the future of our generation. The issue shaping my future is people struggling to reach out for help when they are not okay. This is a major social and emotional problem because when people hide their emotions and mask themselves, their feelings can cause negative changes in them, like their behaviour, their thinking and how they make decisions. Hiding emotions can also cause depression, stress and worse.

This is super important because the current and newer generations like Gen Z, Alpha and Beta, will need to learn the importance of the issue. Because if people and the general public do not learn the importance of mental health and getting help, then people experiencing struggles will face the problems that come with burying emotions and keeping them inside.

For the parliament to help with this issue, there are a few things it could do. Implementing more lessons about mental health in schools could help young people learn. But how lessons are done also matters, so people actually understand the issue. The parliament can also use different ways to show the issue, like campaigns and initiatives about what is happening.

There is some hope, as schools are talking more about the problem, awareness is being raised and more people are talking about their feelings. But from my experience and the experience of others, not everyone understands the weight of the mental baggage people carry. So, more resources and effort should be put towards teaching the importance of mental health.

In conclusion, this issue affects a lot of people and to fight against it, everyone plays a role—because even your friends might be in a critical state of mind, but struggling to ask for help in fear of being misunderstood and disliked. Everyone should try to help if someone is low, and people with resources to raise awareness should try to help.

It is a great speech. Thank you, Jai, for your wisdom and for participating in this great campaign.

Youth—Raise Our Voice in Parliament

MS CLAY (Ginninderra) (4.54): I have a Raise Our Voice speech, which is one of the speeches written by one of our young people, to be read by those who are serving in parliaments. It is a good, two-way street here in which we give voice to the issues and concerns of our young people, but we also get to listen to what those are. I think that is

really powerful. This speech was written by Ananya, who is 22 years old. These are Ananya's words:

As someone who has experienced depression and suicidal ideation, studied psychology at university, runs a mental health awareness initiative, worked as a mental health educator and instructor in the ACT, and am now on my way to becoming a mental health social worker, I have seen the issue from different sides.

I believe young people's mental health is still not taken seriously enough, especially in politics and at decision-making tables.

Access to help is limited. It can be unaffordable, difficult to navigate, and not always inclusive. There are barriers at every level, and young people—one of the most vulnerable groups—are often affected disproportionately.

I want something beyond tokenistic conversations. Talking about youth mental health and acknowledging the problem is only the beginning, not the end. Mental health is political. It is individual, social and systemic. Until we address things like safe and affordable housing, climate change, employment, gender safety and inequality, mental health challenges will continue to grow.

Parliament needs to act at two levels. First, mental health support must be treated as a right, not a luxury. Second, we need long-term thinking around intergenerational fairness and accountability. Decisions should not only respond to the problems young people face today but also consider what kind of society we are leaving for the future generations.

That was Ananya's speech. Thank you, Ananya, for sharing that with us and thank you for letting us hear some of the concerns that you have and that many of our young people have.

Youth—Raise Our Voice in Parliament

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) (4.56): I am also rising this evening to deliver a Raise Our Voice in Parliament campaign speech. Before I speak about that, I want to acknowledge the words that Mr Cain delivered on behalf of Karamveer, who was doing work experience in his office. Those words were extremely powerful about the importance of knowing yourself and ensuring that, whatever you choose to do in life, you are following your own passion and your own journey. Those words were incredibly important to hear in this place.

The purpose of the Raise Our Voice in Parliament campaign is to empower young people to participate in democracy by ensuring their voices and experiences are represented in parliamentary chambers like this one. In 2026, young people aged 25 and under were invited to respond to the questions: "What is one big issue shaping your future, and what is a meaningful action you want parliament to take on it?" We have heard so many great contributions today and I am sure we will hear more, because 662 speeches were submitted by young people across Australia this year.

It was a real pleasure to meet several of the young people participating in Raise Our

Voice in Parliament initiative at last week's reception, including Hunter, whose speech Mr Steel presented earlier. I also acknowledge Alex, who spoke at the reception about climate change. His speech was lyrical and moving and covered one of the topics most often chosen by 2026 Raise Our Voice participants.

Reflecting a major societal shift, even more young people chose to write speeches about technology and/or AI. That includes Henry, aged 21, who lives in Kurrajong, whose speech I am delivering today, if I can get my iPad to—this is spooky because Henry's speech is about the iPad and his challenges with it! It is good that I did not try to do this in 90-second statements! Henry's speech states:

Until age 12, I was an avid reader. In the car, at the table, or before bed, I always had my head in a book. But just before my 12th birthday, something happened that ended my reading obsession so comprehensively that it has never recovered. That defining event was... starting high school, and getting an iPad and phone. I don't blame my parents; the iPad was compulsory for school, and the phone kept me safe on the bus. But constantly having a phone in my pocket since age 12 had major downsides. It made me more socially anxious, and wrecked my attention span. Social media, gaming and other cheap dopamine sources were rampant in class, easily outcompeting schoolwork for our attention. Through their neglect of younger users, the big tech companies, in particular social media, have created an addiction generation. The consequences of this crisis will surely be devastating for educational and social outcomes. Banning phones at school, and social media for under 16s, are positive steps. But we must go further, prohibiting the most addictive features of smartphones and social media platforms, like infinite scroll, autoplay, and algorithmic feeds. Give my generation back our attention span, so we can read, focus and think.

Henry, I do not know if you are watching, but I hope you are either watching now or will catch up on video. Thank you very much for those powerful words. It has been a pleasure to put them on the record on your behalf.

MR EMERSON (Kurrajong) (5.01): This is a speech written by a young person who lives in my electorate as part of the Raise Our Voice in Parliament campaign. Annabelle said:

My name is Annabelle and I am 11 years old. The issue that I want to speak about is the current cost of living crisis. This issue is important to me because if this crisis continues, costs will keep rising until people won't be able to afford a decent meal. This issue is important to all Australians because it affects us all in some way - whether we can't do things like go to the beach for a holiday, or play sports or learn an instrument, or fix our cars or pay for a house. Australians care because eventually they won't be able to pay their rent, buy nice clothes or eat healthy dinners. An action parliament can take is to help businesses to be more competitive. This would help because the more competitive businesses become, the more Australians will be able to access simple luxuries of life. Going without small things to enjoy makes life harder and sadder. Parliament could also set an example by tightening their belts too. This would show everyone that we are working together to get through this.

Thank you, Annabelle.

MS LEE (Kurrajong) (5.02): One of the most important things about a parliament—

any parliament—is that it should be an accessible place for anyone and everyone. The Education Office of OLA does a great job of delivering programs and services that take the Assembly to the community, whether it is the regular free visit tours or the merch-filled stall at the National Multicultural Festival or—my personal favourite—hosting school visits.

Last month, I came up with a special challenge of hosting 88 year 1 students, plus eight teachers, staff and volunteer parents. This visit follows on from the opportunity I had to address Mia’s year 1 cohort on how my role as an elected member has changed over time as part of their unit of inquiry. I have spoken about the lovely thankyou letters I received from the year 1 students and the thumbs-up of approval I received from Mia after my talk—high praise from my seven-year-old daughter. So, in a subsequent conversation that I had with Mia’s teacher, I offered to host the year 1 students for a visit to this Assembly—their Assembly—and I offered to host morning tea to boot. When I made that offer, I confess I thought I was offering it to the class of around 20. When she said, “That’d be great. There’ll be 88 of us,” I said, “Oh. Sure; okay.”

The organisation of this visit took a lot of effort from a lot of people. I put on the record my thanks to my personal staff, Kelli and Tim, and Bronwyn, who came in on her rostered day off and even brought her cousin, who was visiting from interstate, so they could cut up fruit for the hungry six- and seven-year-olds. I also thank the Education Office—Lara, David, and Nicole—for not laughing at me when I told them that I had invited 88 year 1 students, plus eight teachers, staff and parents to the Assembly. Without batting an eyelid, the Education Office put together a tailored program to make the Assembly accessible for our budding voters, including to the Assembly artwork and a mini mock session on decision-making.

I also acknowledge you, Mr Speaker, the Chief Minister and the Leader of the Opposition, who all took time out of their busy day on a sitting week to address the group. Huge kudos to the teachers, staff and volunteer parents who accompanied the 88 six- and seven-year-old students on this school excursion. I cannot even imagine the nerve that takes. I got some great feedback—that, for many of the grown-ups, it was their first time visiting the Assembly. So, now that they have been here once, I hope that they will be back.

Most importantly, I acknowledge the 88 year 1 students who were impeccably behaved throughout the entire visit. The observation from many of the OLA staff and the MLAs was about how polite and well-behaved the group was. That is a credit to the teachers at the school.

Finally, on a personal note, I say the following to my firstborn daughter, Mia. You have never known life without Mum in this Assembly. You have shown incredible resilience and understanding so that I can continue to serve the people of Kurrajong. I am so proud of you and hope that, whilst I might not be in a position to make homemade lunches or be a volunteer parent at a school excursion, I have been able to give you and your classmates an insight into what we do in this building each and every day for our community. You make me a better elected member, keep me grounded and remind me every day that what we do in this chamber matters, and it matters to you and your future. I love you.

Standing orders—suspension

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

That so much of the standing orders be suspended as would prevent the adjournment debate for today continuing for an extra 30 minutes.

Women's health—ovarian cancer

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) (5.06): On a different note this evening, everyone here knows that this year, once again, I am a frocker. Today is Frock Up Day, a day when every donation made to Frocktober is doubled, so, if you have been considering donating to Frocktober generally or to my fundraising efforts, today is the day to do it, please.

Right now, the five-year survival rate for women with ovarian cancer is only 49 per cent. That means more than half of the 2,000 women and girls who are diagnosed with ovarian cancer this year will not be here in five years, and that is completely unacceptable. And 40 per cent of the women and girls who are diagnosed with ovarian cancer each year are under the age of 60. It is an appalling statistic. It is completely unacceptable. But it could be changed if we took symptoms seriously and we developed an early detection test.

Symptoms of ovarian cancer can be extremely vague. As someone with endometriosis and IBS, my symptoms are some of the symptoms that people with ovarian cancer develop. It is things like pelvic pain. It is things like bloating. It is unexplained tiredness. For women who have gone through menopause, unexplained bleeding can be a symptom of ovarian cancer. To any woman who gets unexplained bleeding, please take it seriously. As women—and many of the women in this Assembly will know—things happen to our body and we just ignore it and move on, because we have so much other stuff to deal with in our lives. It is something that happens to a woman's body and you kind of just say, "Okay," and deal with it and move on, because for so long much of society has dismissed so many of our symptoms and women's health. So I implore any woman with symptoms, no matter how vague they are—or someone may know a woman who seems to have changed and has symptoms of ovarian cancer—to please see a doctor and get tested to find out.

I am so encouraged by the scientists and the researchers who are developing and working so hard on an early detection test, because we know that pelvic ultrasound screening is not a good early detection test. It does not always pick up when something is wrong. There is a blood test that is helpful in recognising inflammation, but inflammation can be raised in people with endometriosis and a range of other conditions, so it is not always the best test either. I am encouraged by the researchers who are looking for an early detection test, which is why causes like Frocktober and special events during Frocktober like Frock Up Day are so important to raise money for that research. Research is not cheap. Research, whether it is funded through events like Frocktober, philanthropy or government investment across the country, is how we will get an early detection test and it is how we will change the statistics—which, right now, is a survival rate of 49 per cent—so that the vast majority of women who are diagnosed

will still be here in five years and can enjoy their life.

Youth—Raise Our Voice in Parliament

MS VASSAROTTI (Kurrajong) (5.09): I am also delivering a speech as part of the Raise Our Voice Australia initiative. It is a really fantastic thing to sit in the chamber this evening and hear so many of the speeches of young people yesterday and today. I think that it is certainly a reflection that there is much to be hopeful for in a pretty crazy world. The speech that I am reading into the record tonight is from Clarissa:

My name is Clarissa. I am 20 years old, based in the ACT in the Kurrajong state electorate and the Canberra federal electorate. I have seen some of the best and some of the worst that Australia's health care system has to offer. In particular, I have seen some of the worst it has to offer autistic people.

I am a medium-support needs, high-masking autistic person. You do not necessarily look at me and immediately think, "Autism." But the invisible nature of my autism does not mean it is invisible to how I access health care. It affects how I process information, communicate, respond to questions and how much time I need to process what I have been told. I spent 24 hours in hospital. During dozens of questions my autism was not mentioned once, not during my admission, my handover or by a single nurse or doctor despite it being documented in my file.

The healthcare system remained either oblivious to my autism or to what that meant for how they should interact with me. Healthcare workers need practical autism training, not just training that teaches them that autistic people exist, but what to do with that knowledge.

I don't see a future where I can stop accessing health care, but I need to believe I can see a future where healthcare workers know how to work with me rather than against me, and that is the change I want parliament to take on.

Thank you so much, Clarissa, and thank you so much to Ashleigh, Declan and the team that have brought these features here in this parliament.

Youth—Raise Our Voice in Parliament

MISS NUTTALL (Brindabella) (5.12): Today I rise with pride to deliver a speech written by a very thoughtful young woman in my electorate of Brindabella, Mia. Mia is 12 and has submitted this speech through the Raise Our Voices campaign. Here is her excellent speech:

I am starting High School next year and that is when I have to start making a lot of decisions.

In Primary School mostly my mum or my teachers will tell me what I should do, but now in High School I will need to choose things like my classes. I also will have to choose to do things or not do things. I chose to stay at my school and not move to a different school like some of my friends and my mum helped me decide

that by asking me questions and talking to me.

Sometimes kids might tell me to do things I know are bad and I will have to make a decision not to do bad things. I think kids need to have grown-ups that they can come to when they need help making decisions. I have lots of people to help me, but not all kids have that.

I think Parliament should make sure that all kids starting High School have a person at their school that they can come to for help if their mum is busy or they don't have help. I think each school should get a Parliament person to be in charge of their school and be there to talk to them sometimes too.

I think kids think they don't need help sometimes but really they do and someone needs to make sure they have help.

What I really like about Mia's speech is how it challenged me to think differently about what young people want. I was pretty headstrong as a kid, and I have been going along assuming all young people are like me. It is actually really helpful to know that many young people want help from grown-ups when they are making big decisions. As a politician, I often want help from other grown-ups when I am making big decisions. We are actually very lucky to have people in the Assembly called advisors, who do great research, and they help us connect with communities and make really good decisions. I really think Mia is onto something here, and I will make sure that I keep her speech in mind when I am engaging with young people. I would love to be a parliament person, or a parliamentarian, that can talk to students and help them. Thank you, Mia.

Active travel

MR BRADDOCK (Yerrabi) (5.14): Currently two-thirds of Australians do not get enough exercise to maintain their health. At the same time, our cities are being choked with traffic. It is affecting climate change and costs us billions each year. We must do more to get more people out of their cars and onto bikes. Riding a bike is one of the easiest and most time-efficient ways to get to work. By swapping a car, train or bus for a bike you can get on your recommended daily exercise without having to spend extra time and money at the gym.

There are also other benefits. It improves your health, whether it be reducing risk associated with physical inactivity, including cardiovascular disease, stroke, type 2 diabetes, some cancers and obesity, as well as depression. It saves time. A five- to 10-kilometre ride to work will only take about 15 to 30 minutes on average. Peak-hour trips up to 10 kilometres are generally faster by a bike than any other form of transfer door to door. You also save money, because people who ride to work not only save time, but they also get the chance to save between \$6,000 to \$15,000 per year, which would otherwise be spent on fuel, car repairs, public transport tickets and parking. Also it limits climate change because you are reducing the number of emissions from driving a car around the city, slowing global warming and protecting our future. It increases productivity. Business that encourage staff to cycle to work benefit from increased productivity as a result of improved fitness and mental health. Finally, it actually makes commuting better for all of us, because more people riding bikes makes for more enjoyable commutes and means more space left on the roads for others.

That is why I was delighted to join the National Ride2Work Day just last week, bringing together thousands of Australians who are choosing a healthier, more active way to commute, swapping four wheels for two—well, in fact three, with one recumbent trike I was checking out whilst I was there. I would just like to congratulate Pedal Power for running a really successful day and event. Thank you so much. There was breakfast. There was a choir complete with ukeleles going. There were free bike check-ups with Mojo bike repairs. Well done, Pedal Power and everyone involved, on National Ride2Work Day.

Youth—Raise Our Voice in Parliament

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS (Brindabella) (5.16): I am delighted to return to the chamber this evening to share a speech from Tessa, who lives in Brindabella and is therefore by definition wonderful. I assume that is not the only reason she is wonderful. These are her thoughts as part of this year's Raise Our Voices campaign. She says:

One big issue shaping my future is the amount of single-use packaging polluting our environment. Items such as takeaway food and drink containers are often a mixture of paper and plastic, which litter our streets, release microplastics, and is destined for landfill.

There is a current focus from state and territory governments on phasing out problematic single-use packaging, which I support.

I encourage the Australian Government to implement extended producer responsibility for packaging suppliers and businesses who sell it. This could involve a tax on single-use packaging, as seen in Freiburg, Germany.

Each takeaway cup and meal container costs the businesses an additional 50c, whilst cutlery and straws have a 20c tax. This is a way to raise revenue as well as encourage reusable items. Taxing single-use packaging is a stepping stone towards eventually banning items.

Importantly, items which have an accessible reusable alternative, such as a swap-and-go reusable coffee cup system, should be prioritised. Further research should be done into a reusable cutlery and straw system, for example, before a ban on the more difficult items could take place.

Now is the perfect window of opportunity to act on pollution. We know what to do to make a meaningful difference for our local environment, so let's make the changes together.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

The Assembly adjourned at 5.18 pm.

Schedule of amendments

Schedule 1

Government Agencies (Campaign Advertising) Amendment Bill 2025

Amendments moved by the Chief Minister

1

Clause 5

Page 3, line 13—

[oppose the clause]

2

Clause 10

Proposed new section 18 (1A)

Page 4, line 14—

omit proposed new section 18 (1A), substitute

- (1A) A government agency must not begin or continue a government campaign during a Commonwealth pre-election period if—
- (a) the campaign—
 - (i) is about a program, policy or matter that is wholly or partly funded by the Commonwealth; and
 - (ii) mentions the Commonwealth funding; or
 - (b) the campaign depicts, names or otherwise identifies—
 - (i) a Senator or member of the House of Representatives; or
 - (ii) a candidate or prospective candidate for election as a Senator or member of the House of Representatives.
-