DEBATES

OF THE

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

FOR THE

AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

DAILY HANSARD

Edited proof transcript

27 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 **Tuesday, 17 November 2026.**

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Tuesday, 27 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.

Petitions

The following petitions were lodged for presentation:

Road safety—Reid—petitions 77-26 and 100-26

By **Ms Vassarotti**, *from 269 and 100 residents, respectively:*

> **To the Speaker and Members of the Legislative Assembly for the Australian Capital Territory**
>
> The following residents of the ACT draw the attention of the Assembly to the need for measures to deal with the level and speed of commuter traffic through the residential suburb of Reid.
>
> Reid was designed as a garden city precinct on the periphery of Burley Griffin's "city beautiful" plan. Recent developments have led to some of Reid's streets becoming de facto sub-arterial roads rather than the access and local roads appropriate to any residential precinct/suburb – let alone one that is a heritage precinct. These developments include the:
>
> 1. continual expansion of the office complex at Russell, with its large car parks encouraging commuter traffic;
> 2. shift towards a more dominant city centre with consequent increases in commuter traffic;
> 3. downgrading of Constitution Avenue as an east-west arterial road (40 kph speed limit; bus lane) to more of a local access road. This has created commuter "rat runs" via various streets, including Coranderrk, Booroondara, Currong, and Elimatta streets towards Blarney Cresent, Campbell;
> 4. reduced capacity and service levels on Northbourne Avenue as a result of traffic management changes to accommodate the light rail and encouraging traffic to divert to Limestone Avenue;

5. recent signalisation of the intersection of Euree Street and Limestone Avenue affording a dedicated right-turn phase for traffic from Limestone Avenue into Euree Street. This has facilitated the use of Reid streets to bypass increasing congestion at the Anzac Parade roundabout. At the same time:
6. smart satellite navigation systems find the best routes, regardless of the urban road hierarchy;
7. there is an absence of 50 kph signage where traffic turns off the adjacent 60 kph arterial roads into Reid and speed limits are rarely policed;
8. there is an issue of junction priorities within Reid. The principal "rat run" streets (Booroondara, Currong, Doonkuna, and Elimatta) all have intersection priority along their length within Reid, encouraging their use (and speeding), unhindered by any need to slow, yield or stop at cross-streets. At the intersection of Currong and Euree streets, five serious accidents have occurred in the last three years, requiring police and ambulance attendance, and causing repeated property damage to a house on the corner.

Your petitioners, therefore, request the Assembly to to call on the ACT Government to comply with the ACT Movement and Place Assessment Guide (TCCS) 2025 and reduce the incentive for commuter traffic to travel through Reid by implementing various measures, including:

1. apply a 40 kph speed limit to the suburb. This would require only a few signs, most of which could be fixed to existing street furniture;
2. change the "give way" intersection priority at Euree Street with Currong and Booroondara streets to slow through traffic;
3. install speed cushions or road-narrowing chicanes on selected streets;
4. re-time the signal lights at the intersection of Euree Street and Limestone Avenue to give less time for turns into Euree Street (the purpose being to facilitate safe turns but not encourage them).

Greenway multisport facility—driveway—petition 98-26

By **Mrs Morris**, *from 2 residents:*

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

The following residents of the Australian Capital Territory draw to the attention of the Assembly: To the urgent need to repair the driveway and footpath used to access the side and rear of the multi-sports facility at 299 Soward Way, Greenway.

The multi-sports facility is a government asset managed by Sport and Recreation under the Directorate of Chief Minister, Treasury and Economic Development and is operated by the Tuggeranong Archery Club (TAC), and the Tuggeranong Men's Shed (TMS) as lease and sub-lease holders. Access is also required for wheelchair sports. The footpath and driveway is frequently subjected to heavy flooding obstructing safe access to the TMS. This presents a significant safety risk to the TMS members, many of whom are elderly or require walking aids. The TMS has more than 100 members many of whom use the shed every week. The flooding

> further undermines the integrity of the driveway for heavy vehicles that need to access the loading dock at the side.
>
> Your petitioners therefore request the Assembly to call on the ACT Government to repair the access driveway alongside the multi-sports facility building with a more permanent solution that prevents flooding.

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

Motion to take note of petitions

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

> That the petitions and responses so lodged be noted.

Road safety—Reid—petitions 77-26 and 100-26

MS VASSAROTTI (Kurrajong) (10.01): Today I rise to speak to the petition sponsored by Marianne Albury-Colless regarding the growing issue of rat-running through the historic suburb of Reid in my electorate of Kurrajong. As Canberra grows and more people choose to call our city home, the pressures on our established suburbs inevitably increase.

Urban densification is important. We want people to live close to the city and we welcome the vibrancy it brings. However, to do density well, we must adapt our transport infrastructure so that our older suburbs retain safety and liveability. Reid residents have raised urgent concerns with me about heavy commuter traffic cutting through quiet residential streets. Much of this is driven by tech-bro-built mapping apps that actively divert rush-hour commuters off arterial roads and through suburban streets to save a single minute, simply shifting congestion directly onto quiet neighbourhood roads.

This is not an isolated issue. Just this week, residents in neighbouring Ainslie raised identical concerns in the *Canberra Times*. Given the geographic proximity, it is clear we are dealing with the exact same commuter transit corridor slicing through our local streets. The human cost of this is real. Residents in these areas have literally woken up to car crashes in their front yards, and one can only imagine what effect this begins to have on residents, concerned that one day these crashes will not just be a footnote in the *Canberra Times* but serious incidents.

An immediate and effective measure we can take to restore safety is reducing the local speed limit. The difference in travel time between 40 kilometres per hour and 50 kilometres per hour through a residential neighbourhood is negligible for a driver, but the difference in reaction time and pedestrian safety is massive and potentially lifesaving.

Mr Speaker, our inner north and inner south suburbs are deeply cherished for their heritage character and their streetscapes. As densification continues, as it must, the government has a fundamental duty to manage the spillover impacts. We cannot allow

suburban amenity and neighbourhood safety to become collateral damage to urban growth. We must act to protect these communities.

I would like to commend the Reid residents who have put together this petition that has some really significant and well-evidenced and researched calls. While I know that many residents will be disappointed that we fell just short of the 500 signatures, this remains an issue for me that needs actions. I do intend to have discussions with my Assembly colleagues across all sides about how we can deliver a systemic, long-term solution to these suburban traffic pressures, and I would encourage the Standing Committee on Transport and City Services to consider these matters in their ongoing work as well.

MR BRADDOCK (Yerrabi) (10.05): Mr Speaker, I want to make a few extra remarks which I think are relevant to this conversation about rat-running. There is a correlation between speed limits, road design and how those roads are ultimately used. We have a situation right now where navigation apps, such as google maps, appear to be looking at some of our suburban roads and seeing major collector routes. They are actively recommending that drivers rat-run through places like Reid because they have genuinely concluded that this is the ideal way to get from the city to Campbell.

I would like to draw members' attention to something published by Austroads in the last few weeks. It is called the *Austroads Pedestrian Safety Blueprint*. The blueprint highlights how, across Australia and New Zealand, the rates of death and serious injury to pedestrians have plateaued over the last 10 years. It tells us, in no uncertain terms, that if we want to meet Vision Zero's target for zero road-related deaths and zero injuries, we need to do things differently, including to scale up and accelerate the implementation of what we already know is working.

The blueprint highlights, very clearly, that adopting safer speeds is the most impactful, cost-effective and fastest means of making progress towards zero harm for pedestrians. It recommends we target speed limits of 30 to 40 kilometres per hour in school zones, high-pedestrian-activity areas and local streets, and 50 to 60 kilometres per hour on connector roads.

Adopting the very clear recommendations of the *Austroads Pedestrian Safety Blueprint* would go a very long way to meeting the calls of this petition to reduce rat-running in Reid. It can begin with as little as some basic signage on lower speed limits and progress with road upgrades over time, as we see people adapt. At the very least, the navigation apps would react to a lower speed limit almost immediately, and the scale of what further interventions will be needed would quickly become apparent.

I would like to thank Ms Albury-Colless for having the confidence to put forward this petition and Ms Vassarotti for sponsoring it. There is a lot that can be achieved in this petition which aligns extremely well with the objective of Vision Zero, and I strongly support its calls.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Legislative Assembly—continuing resolution 7
Statement by Speaker

MR SPEAKER (Mr Hanson) (10.07): Before we turn to ministerial statements, following the debate last week, Ms Cheyne asked about continuing resolution 7, which provides guidance on members exercising their right to freedom of speech, and I discussed the matter yesterday with the Standing Committee on Administration and Procedure. We all understand freedom of speech is a foundational part of our parliamentary system; continuing resolution 7, however, notes the harms that exercising such rights can have on individuals when allegations are made, particularly given the limited avenues non-members have to respond to such allegations. This includes allegations against public servants.

There will, undoubtably, be situations where the conduct of public servants or others raises questions. Last week, some questions related not to allegations but to facts established by the Integrity Commission, and other matters involving another individual, already publicly aired, were raised in question time. I ask members to keep in mind the rules that questions should not name persons unless strictly necessary to render questions intelligible, and nor should they contain inferences or imputations. Members may wish to consider whether sensitive matters should be initially pursued in a less public manner, for example through correspondence, with public questions remaining an option should information not be forthcoming.

I also note that parliamentary debate may contain subject matter that can also distress or cause trauma to certain individuals. I ask members to be mindful of the potential impact of their words and consider signalling their intent to touch upon sensitive matters, thereby allowing individuals the ability to choose or not to engage with the material.

ACT Carers Strategy 2018-2028—update
Ministerial statement

MS TOUGH (Brindabella—Minister for Human Rights, Minister for Community Services, Minister for Corrections, Minister for Women, Seniors and Veterans, and Minister for the Prevention of Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence) (10.09): Mr Speaker, as the Minister for Community Services, I am privileged to have responsibility for carers policy in the ACT. This portfolio provides an important opportunity to recognise the invaluable role carers play in supporting individuals, families and communities across our city.

October 11 to 17 was National Carers Week, and the theme of National Carers Week this year was "Care for a Carer: Making Carers Visible". Every day, carers demonstrate extraordinary compassion, dedication and resilience. Their efforts often take place behind the scenes, yet their contribution is vital to the wellbeing of those they support and the strength of our community.

I am pleased to provide an update on progress under the ACT Carers Strategy 2018-2028. In the ACT, approximately 58,000 carers provide unpaid care and support to family members, friends and loved ones, including foster and kinship carers. Among them are around 5,000 young carers, who take on caring responsibilities while balancing school, study and other important aspects of their lives.

The contribution carers make to our city is extraordinary. It is estimated carers in

Canberra provide the equivalent of around $1.7 billion in unpaid care each year. The ACT government recognises the invaluable contribution carers make to our community and remains committed to ensuring they are recognised, supported and empowered to participate fully in community life. We are committed to improving the supports available to carers so that they can continue in their caring role while maintaining their own health, wellbeing and aspirations. And I want to acknowledge the work of my predecessor, Minister Orr, for all the work she has done in this space.

As we enter the final years of the ACT Carers Strategy 2018-2028, we have developed and released the final action plan 2026-2028 in partnership with Carers ACT, carers and sector partners. This targeted final action plan centres on four priority areas: improving access to services and supports for carers; strengthening recognition of carers and raising community awareness; supporting young carers; and enhancing data, coordination and system capability.

The strategy will continue to be guided through a partnership between the ACT government, Carers ACT and the carer community. This collaborative approach supports shared ownership of the final action plan, strengthens accountability, and helps ensure implementation remains responsive to the needs and experiences of carers across the ACT, while aligning with the ACT government's broader commitments. Through this work, we are reaffirming our commitment to recognising, valuing and supporting carers, and to ensuring their voices continue to inform the policies and services which affect their lives. To be a community that cares for carers and the people they care for, and supporting carers, is investing in Canberra's future.

Over the last year, the ACT government has continued to deliver practical initiatives which recognise, support and empower carers across our community. Caring responsibilities can affect a person's ability to participate in education, employment and other opportunities. Through the ACT Women's Return to Work Program, women and gender-diverse people who have been out of the workforce, including due to caring responsibilities, have been supported to re-enter employment, education and training.

In 2025-26, 157 return to work grants were awarded, providing $159,000 in support, with three-quarters of grant recipients identifying as parents or carers of dependent children. The program also delivered community workshops which helped build confidence, job readiness and employment skills.

The ACT Education Directorate has continued work to strengthen recognition and support for young carers across ACT public schools. While the review of the Safe and Supportive Schools Policy remains underway, updated guidance and supporting materials have been published to assist schools in recognising young carers and supporting their ongoing engagement in education.

Development of the ACT Education Directorate Carer Recognition and Support Implementation Plan 2026-2029 is also progressing. This work includes improved identification and data collection, consistent student support processes and increased awareness of carers and their contribution to the community. The directorate has also continued its partnership with Connecting Young Carers to Life Opportunities and Personalised Support, CYCLOPS, including regular engagement to support a coordinated approach for young carers in ACT public schools and inform future

system-level planning.

The Child, Youth and Families Division, CYF, continued to strengthen practical supports for foster and kinship carers and improve access to information and resources. This included the ongoing development and promotion of the Kinship and Foster Carers Resource Hub, which provides carers with a central and accessible source of information, resources and support.

The ACT *Carer Handbook* was reviewed and updated to ensure it reflects current legislation, out-of-home care arrangements and available supports. The updated handbook provides carers with clear and accessible information to help them understand their role, navigate the care system and access assistance when needed. Together, these initiatives are helping foster and kinship carers access practical support and information, strengthening their capacity to meet the needs of the children and young people in their care.

During Foster and Kinship Care Week, CYF partnered with Carers ACT and out-of-home care providers to host a carer appreciation dinner, bringing together carers, support staff and community partners to recognise the important role carers play in providing safe, stable and nurturing homes for children and young people. The event provided an opportunity for carers to connect with one another and with support services, while reinforcing the value placed on carers within the ACT care system. A highlight of the evening was hearing from an adult with lived experience of care, who reflected on the significant and enduring impact their carers had on their life.

In August 2026, the CYF Kinship Service, together with partner agencies, hosted its annual National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children's Day community celebration. Under the theme "Living Our Truth", the event celebrated the strength, culture and resilience of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children through cultural activities, storytelling and community connection. The fourth annual event recorded its highest attendance since it began and provided a culturally safe space for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, carers and families to connect with culture, strengthen identity and build a sense of belonging.

The ACT government also continued to support carers through initiatives which promote social connection and wellbeing. The dementia friendly A Day at the Movies program, provides an inclusive and welcoming experience for people living with dementia and their families, friends and carers. Delivered in partnership with Carers ACT and Dementia Australia, the program has provided opportunities for carers to connect with others, access support and enjoy shared experiences in a supportive environment.

The ACT government remains committed to ensuring carers have a voice in the design and delivery of services. Through Canberra Health Services partnering with the Consumer and Carer Advisory Committee, Carers ACT continues to contribute the perspectives and experiences of carers to policy development, service improvement activities and the review of customer information and feedback processes. This partnership helps ensure carers' voices are reflected in decisions which affect them and the people they support.

We have also strengthened support for carers navigating complex health systems. The Liaison and Navigation Service and Paediatric Liaison and Navigation Service provide coordinated support for individuals with complex healthcare needs, working closely with carers to reduce the challenges associated with accessing and managing care. Feedback from carers show these services improve confidence, reduce stress and help connect families with important supports, including respite and community services.

There has been continued investment in systemic advocacy. In 2026-27, the government is providing $187,676 to support advocacy for carers of people with disability, ensuring carers' voices and experiences are reflected in policies, programs and services. This investment helps empower carers to contribute to important policy discussions, strengthens access to information and support, and promotes greater inclusion and participation.

Through this work, carers' voices have informed discussions on issues such as NDIS and aged care reforms, respite funding, implementation of the ACT Carers Recognition Act 2021, ACT budget priorities and access to carer support services. Advocacy activities have also helped raise community awareness of the vital role carers play and contributed to greater recognition of carers across government systems and services.

Technology is also helping carers play a greater role in supporting loved ones. Through the territory's Digital Health Record, carers can access health information and support care coordination through secure proxy access arrangements. As of June 2026, more than 26,000 active MyDHR accounts had proxy access enabled, helping carers stay informed and engaged in healthcare decisions.

The ACT government has also continued to strengthen protections which benefit carers and the people they support. Reforms to the Discrimination Act 1991 have introduced positive duties requiring organisations to provide reasonable adjustments and to take proactive steps to eliminate discrimination, vilification and sexual harassment. These changes contribute to a more inclusive community and help ensure people living with disability, and their carers, are better supported to participate fully in everyday life.

We recognise many carers are also employees. Across the ACT public service and government workplaces, flexible working arrangements, leave provisions and supportive workplace practices continue to help employees balance caring responsibilities with meaningful employment. Within the ACT Education Directorate, for example, staff are now able to identify as carers when providing feedback on human resources policies, helping ensure carers' experiences are considered during policy development and review. By promoting flexible work, supportive management practices and inclusive workplace cultures, we are helping carers remain connected to the workforce while managing their caring commitments.

Looking ahead, the ACT's implementation of Thriving Kids will deliver important early intervention supports for children with developmental delay and autism, while also strengthening support for parents, carers and kin. Through consultation with families, carers and service providers, we have heard clearly that effective supports must recognise the needs of the whole family. This feedback is helping shape a system which is more integrated, accessible and responsive to the needs of children and those who care for them.

Together, these initiatives demonstrate the ACT government's ongoing commitment to recognising carers, strengthening supports, promoting inclusion and ensuring carers can continue to participate fully in community life while undertaking the invaluable work they do every day. Carers ACT has continued to play a critical role in supporting carers and advancing the objectives of the ACT Carers Strategy through advocacy, service delivery, community engagement and lived experience.

During the past year, Carers ACT worked closely with government and carers across the territory to strengthen carer recognition, improve access to support and ensure carers' voices continue to inform policy and service reform. This included working with government to explore the feasibility of a carers recognition card so that carers can more easily access services and supports without having to continually verify they are a carer.

Work has also progressed on the development of a young carer mentoring program. The program aims to provide young carers with mentoring, guidance and connection opportunities to support participation in education, employment and community life. Through this initiative, Carers ACT seeks to strengthen peer connections and build confidence amongst young carers as they navigate their caring responsibilities.

Carers ACT has continued to advocate for improved respite options for Canberra's carers. Access to respite is essential to supporting carers' wellbeing and enabling sustainable caring relationships. Carers ACT has continued to work with government on commitments relating to wellbeing and respite infrastructure, recognising the critical role respite services play in supporting carers' health and quality of life. Work will be undertaken as part of the final action plan to explore options for a purpose-built carer wellbeing and respite hub, to support both carers and the people they care for.

To increase public recognition of caring, Carers ACT launched the "Are You a Carer?" campaign. The campaign aims to improve awareness of caring roles across health services, community organisations, workplaces and government agencies, while encouraging carers to identify themselves and connect with support services earlier. Through the campaign, more carers have recognised their caring role and become aware of the support services available to them.

Carers ACT has also continued delivering Carer Awareness Training across government and service systems, including training provided to the Mental Health, Justice Health and Alcohol and Drug Services, MHJHADS; Housing ACT; and Health and Community Services Directorate staff. This training promotes greater understanding of carers' experiences and supports the adoption of carer-inclusive practices which strengthen identification, recognition and timely referral to supports.

Listening to carers and incorporating lived experience into policy and service development remains a key priority. Through the Carer Collective, facilitated by Carers ACT, carers have contributed valuable insights on issues including navigating health, disability and aged care systems, the impact of artificial intelligence on caring, participation in community sport, the experiences of young carers, and the wellbeing of kinship and foster carers. Carers have also provided feedback on initiatives such as the development of a new respite booking tool. These activities ensure carers' lived experience continues to inform government decision-making and service improvement.

Carers ACT also led a successful National Carers Week 2025 program under the local theme, "A Community that Cares for Carers". More than 250 carers participated in events focused on recognition, wellbeing, connection and inclusion. Activities throughout the week celebrated the contribution of more than 58,000 carers while increasing broader public awareness of caring roles and responsibilities. National Carers Week also marked the opening of Carers ACT's new Crace Respite Cottage, expanding respite options for carers supporting people who are aging or living with dementia.

As the ACT's peak body representing mental health carers, Carers ACT's Mental Health Carers Voice Program has continued to strengthen the representation of mental health carers through consultation, research and participation in commissioning processes. The program launched its biennial survey; worked with Mental Health, Justice Health, Alcohol and Drugs Services on implementation of the carer experience survey; and contributed to mental health commissioning discussions to help ensure services remain responsive to carers, families, supporters and kin.

Through advocacy, consultation and community engagement, Carers ACT has also continued to ensure carers are recognised in major reform processes and public policy discussions. This includes contributing to debates on disability, aged care and mental health reform, implementation of the Carers Recognition Act 2021, respite funding and access to services. Through these efforts, Carers ACT continues to strengthen recognition of carers and promote a community where carers are valued, supported and empowered to participate fully in community life.

As we move into the final years of the ACT Carers Strategy 2018-2028, we can reflect on the significant progress made to better recognise, support and value carers across our community. Through the collective efforts of government, Carers ACT, service providers and carers themselves, we have strengthened awareness of the vital role carers play and delivered practical initiatives to help carers participate in community, education and employment, while supporting their own health and wellbeing. While important work remains, the achievements delivered under the strategy provide a strong foundation as we focus on implementing the final action plan 2026-2028 and preparing for the next chapter of carers policy in the ACT.

On behalf of the ACT government and the Canberra community, I thank the more than 58,000 carers across the territory for their dedication and the vital contribution they make every day. I also acknowledge Carers ACT and our sector partners for their ongoing collaboration in supporting positive outcomes for carers across the ACT.

I present the following paper:

> Annual progress update on the ACT Carers Strategy 2018-2028—Ministerial statement, 27 October 2026.

I move:

> That the Assembly take note of the paper.

MS VASSAROTTI (Kurrajong) (10.25): I rise to acknowledge the more than 58,000 carers in our community, who provide care, support, advocacy and love to family members, friends and loved ones every single day. As the minister's statement notes, carers provide about $1.7 billion of unpaid care each year in Canberra. While we can put a dollar figure on that contribution, the reality is that carers do much more than support our economy. They are the backbone of it. Without carers our health system, aged care system, disability system and community services simply could not function as they do today. Every day carers step in where systems fall short. They navigate complex bureaucracies, advocate for loved ones, coordinate appointments, manage medications, provide emotional support and often sacrifice their own financial security, careers, education and wellbeing in the process.

The ACT Greens welcome the progress outlined in this update. We acknowledge the work of Carers ACT, carers themselves, advocacy organisations and government officials who have contributed to advancing the goals of the strategy. We particularly welcome the continued focus on young carers, recognition initiatives and efforts to ensure that carers have a stronger voice in policy development.

However, this update does come at a time of enormous change and uncertainty for many carers. Across Australia carers are dealing with significant reforms in aged care, disability and health systems. While reform is often necessary, it can also be deeply stressful for the people expected to navigate these changes on behalf of someone they care for. Too often carers are left trying to understand new systems, new eligibility requirements and new service arrangements while already carrying a significant caring load. While governments describe these reforms as improvements, for many families they can feel like another layer of administration, uncertainty and stress.

We need to ensure that carers are supported through these transitions and not expected to absorb the costs and risks of systemic change. What carers have consistently told us is that uncertainty itself creates pressure. It is therefore concerning that, despite recognition in this statement of the critical importance of respite, there remains considerable uncertainty about respite services and future capacity here in the ACT. The statement notes the ongoing work to explore the options for a purpose-built wellbeing and respite hub and acknowledges the continued advocacy around respite funding and infrastructure.

The Greens support this work, but we also know that carers need more than plans and exploration. They need confidence that respite services will be available when they need them. Respite is not a luxury. It is an essential support that enables caring relationships to remain sustainable. It protects carers from burnout, supports their physical and mental health and helps people to continue caring safely and effectively in the long term. We remain concerned that at a time when demand is growing there is little evidence that we will see a significant increase in respite capacity that carers have been calling for.

Carers deserve certainty that support will be there when they need a break, when they face illness themselves or when circumstances suddenly change. The reality is that when there are workforce shortages in aged care, disability support and community services, carers fill the gap. Every unfilled shift, every delayed service, every support package that cannot be delivered ultimately places additional pressure on unpaid carers.

Governments often talk about carers as though they are a resource that will always be there, but carers are not an inexhaustible resource; they are people. If we fail to support them, the consequences will be felt across our health system, disability services, the aged care sector and the wider community.

The Greens believe that looking after carers means investing in respite, investing in wellbeing supports and investing in services that recognise carers as people with their own needs, aspirations and rights. We should also acknowledge the financial pressures faced by carers. Many carers are balancing rising housing costs, energy bills and everyday expenses while reducing their paid work to care for someone they love. When we talk about supporting carers, we must recognise that caring often comes with a significant financial penalty.

Too often carers put their own health last. They cancel appointments, delay treatment and neglect their own wellbeing because the person they care for comes first. A sustainable caring system requires us to support carers as people in their own right, not simply as an extension of the support service system.

As we move towards the final years of this strategy and begin thinking about what comes next, we must ensure that carers are not treated as an endless resource. Their generosity should never be taken for granted. If we want a community that cares for carers, as the strategy envisions, we must move beyond recognition alone. Recognition is important, but recognition without adequate support risks becoming nothing but symbolism.

The ACT Greens will continue to advocate for stronger supports for carers, improved respite options, meaningful involvement of carers in decision-making and policies that recognise the pressures created by ongoing reform in aged care, disability and healthcare systems.

The next phase of this strategy must deliver more than recognition. It must provide certainty around respite services, increase respite capacity, strengthen carers' financial security and ensure carers are genuine partners in the design of systems they rely on. Carers have carried our community for decades; it is time for our community to carry them. To every carer in Canberra, we see you, we see the work you do, we value it and we know that our community is stronger because of your contribution.

MS CARRICK (Murrumbidgee) (10.33): I would like to start by acknowledging the important work that our 58,000 carers do in our community. I welcome the initiatives outlined in the ministerial statement. The Crace Respite Cottage, continued advocacy through Carers ACT and the commitment to investigate a future respite and wellbeing hub are all worthwhile initiatives. They are positive steps, and they will undoubtedly be of benefit to some carers.

But I also think we need to be honest about what many carers are telling us. What they are telling us is that what new carers need most is not another strategy, another consultation or another awareness campaign; what they need is access to bookable overnight respite beds that provide them with a general break from their caring responsibilities.

Recently I received correspondence from a constituent who had been caring for family members for 37 years. Their message was dark. They spoke about caring for a family member with severe disability and a spouse with complex health needs and said quite simply, "I am over caring." That sentiment is not unique. Many carers, particularly women, caring for people with dementia, Parkinson's disease, Alzheimer's disease, frailty and complex behavioural conditions are carrying extraordinary responsibilities every day. They are often exhausted, isolated and struggling to find respite when they need it most. For them, the key issue is not recognition, it is access—access to a respite bed when they need a break, access to a service they can book with confidence, access to support that allows them to continue caring without reaching breaking point.

While it is positive that Burrangiri's 15 beds will no longer close—that is half of Canberra's overnight respite beds—I believe both the ACT and commonwealth governments should be focusing on securing additional beds and sustainable funding for more permanent overnight respite services. The ACT government should be pressing the commonwealth not only to keep Burrangiri operational but to ensure that funding is directed towards expanding respite capacity. Ten million dollars will be spent on Burrangiri and $7.9 million on temporary beds while Burrangiri is closed for an upgrade. That is $17.9 million that will be spent, and not one additional bed will be provided while carers continue to struggle to find a bed. At the end of the day carers do not get respite from a strategy; they get respite from high-care respite beds. If we genuinely want to support carers, we must make sure those beds are available when they need them.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Domestic, family and sexual violence prevention
Ministerial statement

MS TOUGH (Brindabella—Minister for Human Rights, Minister for Community Services, Minister for Corrections, Minister for Women, Seniors and Veterans, and Minister for the Prevention of Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence) (10.36): I rise today to reaffirm the Barr Labor government's enduring commitment to ending domestic, family and sexual violence. Our community is built on the fundamental values of care, respect, safety and inclusion. Domestic, family and sexual violence is incompatible with these values, yet so many Canberrans have been touched by this crisis; they have supported a friend, been terrified for a sister or they have directly experienced abuse or violence. This must end. It cannot be the norm for the next generation.

Our government remains steadfast in its commitment to preventing violence before it occurs, responding effectively when it does and working towards a future where everyone in our community can live free from violence. We have made significant investment, more than $150 million over the next four years, to expand frontline services, specialist sexual violence responses and child and young person support services. To ensure no Canberran is left behind, we are investing in accessible, inclusive services designed specifically for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, culturally and linguistically diverse communities and LGBTIQA+ communities.

This is more than just the dollars spent. It is about driving a seismic shift to end violence,

protect our children from its devasting effects and deliver a safer future for generations to come. I am pleased to share that earlier this year our government launched the ACT Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Strategy 2026-2036, alongside the First Action Plan 2026-2028. This strategy is the product of extensive and meaningful consultation with victim-survivors; the domestic, family and sexual violence sector; Aboriginal Community-Controlled Organisations; other community organisations; and government agencies.

The strategy sets out a long-term vision of Canberra as a safe, equitable society where everyone lives free from domestic, family and sexual violence and feels safe in their relationships, homes, workplaces, education settings and communities. It provides a pathway to reforming key systems to address domestic, family and sexual violence over the coming decade and sets six outcomes to achieve this vision. The strategy is being implemented through three consecutive action plans, each outlining the practical steps we will take to progress the six outcomes over the life of the strategy.

The first action plan focuses on practical, high-impact actions, including strengthening frontline services, supporting children and young people, expanding culturally responsive programs, building workforce capability and improving accountability across the system. Our government listened carefully to the insights shared to inform this strategy, and it continues to build on existing advice to government such as the *Long yarn* report, the *Listen. Take action to prevent, believe and heal* report and the Sexual Assault (Police) Review.

A monitoring and evaluation framework is currently being developed to establish a consistent approach to how the ACT government monitors, reports and evaluates reforms and initiatives to address domestic, family and sexual violence. Importantly, this will ensure that the progress and impact of the strategy and supporting action plans are effectively measured.

As mentioned earlier, our government is making record investments to address domestic, family and sexual violence. Through the 2026-27 budget, the government is investing an additional $47.8 million over four years. Combined with existing investments, our government has committed $151.4 million over the next four years across prevention, early intervention, response and recovery initiatives. The Safer Families Levy continues to make an important contribution to this work, providing approximately $63 million of this investment.

These figures do not capture the full extent of our government's investment because additional funding is embedded across the justice, policing, courts, corrections, health, housing, community services and legal assistance systems. This one government approach plays a critical role in preventing violence, responding when it occurs, supporting victim-survivors and rebuild their lives and ensuring perpetrators are held accountable.

A key focus of the 2026-27 budget is strengthening the frontline services that victim-survivors rely on every day. The budget provides $44.2 million over four years for frontline domestic, family and sexual violence services, delivering greater funding certainty and stability for specialist organisations supporting victim-survivors and delivering programs that address the use of violence. This funds critical services for

victim-survivors and builds on significant work undertaken over recent years to ensure services can better meet the diverse needs of victim-survivors.

Our government recognises that children and young people must be supported as victims in their own right. That is why our government is investing in services for children and young people, such as the Heartfelt program, the Solid Ground program, the Beryl Kids and Young People Safe and Strong van, delivering mobile trauma-informed therapy to children, Doris Women's Refuge children's worker program and funding for two specialist children's workers within the YWCA Canberra's domestic violence support service. Importantly, we invested in the Victim Survivor Voices project, led by Women's Health Matters, in partnership with Sisters in Spirit Aboriginal Corporation, ensuring victim-survivors are at the heart of reform and that lived experience continues to inform government policy and investment.

Equally as important, our government is committed to working in genuine partnership with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community to respond to domestic, family and sexual violence. The strategy is underpinned by the understanding that solutions are best led and delivered by the community, for the community, which is why our government agreed in full to the recommendations of the *Long yarn* report and continues to work in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to implement these reforms. We have also committed $6 million over three years to support Aboriginal community-controlled organisations and community-led initiatives and are further investing in improved responses to sexual violence experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

We have invested in the establishment of independent sexual violence advisers to help victim-survivors navigate the service system. We have also continued to invest in the wraparound program, providing multi-agency, integrated responses for victim-survivors of sexual violence. In response to the recommendations of the Sexual Assault (Police) Review, the ACT government has implemented the sexual assault advocates program within Victim Support ACT. Through the co-location of specialist advocates with ACT Policing, victim-survivors have access to a dedicated point of contact throughout the investigation process, helping ensure investigations are conducted in a more victim-centred and trauma-informed way. Additional investment in the Witness Assistance Service is also strengthening support for victim-survivors of sexual violence as matters progress through the justice system.

Preventing future violence means meaningful engagement with people who use violence, while always prioritising victim-survivor safety. Over the past two years we have invested in behaviour change programs delivered by DVCS and EveryMan Australia, including Room4Change, invitation to responsibility and the Preventing Violence, Changing Behaviour Program. Through these programs, people who use violence can access interventions in a wide range of settings, helping them to change harmful behaviours. We have also invested in the Family Violence Safety Action Program, which provides intensive, coordinated support for victim-survivors and families facing the highest risk of domestic and family violence. The program brings agencies together to focus on the behaviours of people using violence, strengthening accountability and improving safety for victim-survivors.

Our government has undertaken a significant and ongoing program of legislative reform

to strengthen protections in response to domestic, family and sexual violence. Our government introduced affirmative consent reforms through the Crimes (Consent) Amendment Act 2022, being the first jurisdiction in Australia to legislate an affirmative communicative model of consent. These reforms establish that consent is not to be presumed and that a person must take active steps to ascertain whether another person is consenting. We completed a statutory review of affirmative consent laws in September 2025. The review identified areas that may warrant further consideration and monitoring, and our government has continued to consider these areas to assess if further reform is required.

Coercive control is a serious form of abuse that can cause profound and lasting harm. It involves patterns of behaviour that are intended to dominate, isolate and control victim-survivors. The Crimes (Coercive Control) Amendment Bill 2026 was introduced in May 2026. The bill marks a significant step forward in strengthening responses to domestic, family and sexual violence. It reflects the voices and advocacy of the community and has been shaped through extensive engagement with victim-survivors, community organisations and justice sector stakeholders to ensure the reforms are practical, informed and responsive to lived experience.

We have also introduced the Family, Personal and Sexual Violence Legislation Amendment Bill 2025, with a range of amendments to improve how ACT laws respond to domestic, family and sexual violence. I thank the Attorney-General for leading this important legislation. This bill includes establishing the family violence safety notice scheme to enable police officers to issue short-term protection notices where immediately necessary, preventing any reduction of the severity of sentences for all sexual offences against children because of an offender's good character, simplifying and streamlining proceedings regarding family violence orders and personal violence orders and resolving inconsistencies and ambiguities regarding service requirements for family violence orders and personal violence orders.

These reforms reflect a sustained program of legislative change to strengthen protections for victim-survivors, improve accountability for perpetrators and ensure the ACT's legal framework continues to respond to the evolving understanding of domestic, family and sexual violence.

Another significant reform that is underway is the implementation of the domestic and family violence information-sharing scheme. The scheme, which will commence on 24 November, is critical to driving a more integrated approach to responding to domestic and family violence in the ACT. The scheme will promote information-sharing between prescribed government and community sector agencies to build a clearer understanding of domestic and family violence risk, including before a crisis occurs. This will enable services to better protect and support victim-survivors and make sure people who use violence are being held to account.

The 2026-27 budget provides dedicated funding to establish the information-sharing coordinator. This is an independent function which will oversee the scheme and support prescribed entities to build their capacity and understanding of their new responsibilities. The information-sharing coordinator will be recruited shortly and located in the ACT Human Rights Commission.

To ensure that all entities participating in the scheme have a common understanding and approach to assessing and managing domestic and family violence risk, our government, in consultation with the domestic and family violence sector, has updated the ACT domestic and family violence risk assessment and management framework. The updated framework will include better integration of coercive control and a suite of new screening and assessment tools to support frontline workforces. From November this year, over 700 training places will be available to support priority government and community sector workforces to support them to embed the new framework into their practice.

Our government understands that ending domestic, family and sexual violence requires sustained investment in prevention and the promotion of healthy, respectful and equitable relationships. That is why we delivered public awareness campaigns to improve community understanding of coercive control, as well as an award-winning affirmative consent campaign aimed at educating young people about respectful relationships and consent. The government has also implemented respectful relationships education in schools and commenced work to develop an ACT-specific primary prevention model.

We are advancing gender equity through the ACT Women's Plan 2016-2026 and the Capital of Equality Strategy 2024-2029, as gender inequality is a key driver of domestic, family and sexual violence. We also recognise that domestic, family and sexual violence can occur across all relationship types and communities. By promoting equality, inclusion and participation and addressing barriers experienced by women and diverse communities, we are tackling the conditions that enable violence to occur. Together, these efforts are helping to build the foundations for safe, respectful and equitable relationships by fostering positive attitudes and behaviours, changing harmful gender stereotypes and addressing the underlying drivers of gender-based violence.

However, we know there is more to do. Creating lasting cultural change requires a sustained commitment from governments, communities, schools, workplaces and individuals. Through the first action plan under the ACT Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Strategy, we will focus on building community awareness and understanding of domestic, family and sexual violence. We will continue to strengthen community awareness of coercive control, continue successful initiatives such as respectful relationships education, implement a community education program in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and further explore actions to address the structural drivers of violence. By continuing to invest in prevention, we are working towards a future where respectful relationships, equality and safety are understood, valued and embedded across our community.

Over the past two years the government has delivered substantial reform and investment across the domestic, family and sexual violence system. We have invested record funding in frontline services, developed a new 10-year strategy, progressed coercive control legislation, progressed implementation of the information-sharing scheme, strengthened perpetrator interventions, expanded support services and supports for victim-survivors and continued to invest in prevention.

We will not rest on our laurels. We will work harder to support women and children to reach safety and heal. We will identify the most effective responses to this crisis and

target our efforts. We will continue to listen to the voices of survivors, and we will continue to seek guidance from experts and be informed by evidence.

Our government's vision is cemented on a community where all Canberrans live safely and free from domestic, family and sexual violence. Ending domestic, family and sexual violence will require sustained effort, strong leadership and a shared commitment across our community, but through continued action, accountability and collaboration we can build a safer future for all Canberrans.

I present the following paper:

> Government actions on prevention of domestic, family and sexual violence—Ministerial statement, 27 October 2026.

I move:

> That the Assembly take note of the paper.

MS VASSAROTTI (Kurrajong) (10.51): I welcome the opportunity to speak to the minister's statement on the seriousness of domestic, family and sexual violence. I also welcome the minister's update on the work being undertaken in the ACT to respond to domestic, family and sexual violence and, most importantly, to end it. Domestic and family violence is also a serious social and public health challenge and one that is related to, and overlaps with, sexual violence.

I will start by reaffirming the view of the Greens that sexual violence and violence against women is a horrific problem in the ACT and in Australia. It is absolutely unacceptable that these crimes occur at all, let alone to the extent that they do. There has been an ongoing failure at many levels to mitigate this issue, and domestic, family and sexual violence remains a shameful problem that continues to impact the lives of so many victim-survivors, their families and the people who love them.

According to the Australian Institute for Health and Welfare, nationally, more than one in four Australian women have experienced domestic and family violence since the age of 15. The most extreme result of family and domestic violence is homicide. In Australia, taking the 2024-25 figures, one woman was killed by an intimate partner every 11 days on average. We talked about this in the last sitting but I think it is important that we pause and reflect on that figure again. It is shocking, utterly unacceptable and it demands action.

I welcome the minister's statement on the amount of funding dedicated to domestic, family and sexual violence responses. I commend the investment to support the needs of victim-survivors; to work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities; and to improve the system response to sexual violence and the services to respond to people who use violence, to help them change their harmful and violent behaviour.

As we develop the ACT's response to family, domestic and sexual violence over the next 10 years, it is vitally important that we continue to listen to the diverse experiences of victim-survivors. It is also important that we work closely with frontline service providers to understand the particular pressures facing our society and what it will take

to ensure that everyone can feel safe in their relationships, their homes, workplaces, educational settings and communities.

I thank the minister for discussing the ongoing program of legislative reform to strengthen protections and responses to domestic, family and sexual violence. The significant program of work undertaken to criminalise coercive control speaks to how important responding to all forms of violence is, and how important it is that we get it right.

I would also like to discuss a number of reforms put forward by the Greens this term which speaks to the depth and breadth of the issue of violence and the many different ways in which we need to respond to it. Last sitting I was proud to bring forward a motion proposing a portable rental bond scheme. On the face of it this may not seem like a policy to address domestic, family and sexual violence. A scheme to reduce the cost of moving house may also seem to benefit students in share houses and young professionals. However, frontline services and victim-survivors themselves tell us the cost of moving house can be a serious impediment to leaving violence. Any opportunity we have to make the system and our society fairer should be taken as an opportunity to make life a little safer for the victims of domestic, family and sexual violence.

The Greens will also be proposing amendments to the Liquor Amendment Bill, which is currently before the Assembly, and I have discussed these with the government and opposition. The amendment would make harm minimisation and prevention of gender-based violence the paramount objective of the Liquor Act. That is a recommendation from national experts for the prevention of gendered violence that was agreed to and championed by national cabinet. The same recommendation was made by a royal commission in South Australia examining family, domestic and sexual violence.

It is now up to governments to follow through on these recommendations and the promises made by national cabinet. However, I note the government has rejected the proposal in its response to the legal affairs committee. The reason seems to be a kind of spurious argument around night-time economy, maybe similar to the one we heard recently from the government as it justified allowing pokies to operate until 4 am.

If the government is truly committed to preventing gendered violence, it will support the Greens' amendment to make harm minimisation a paramount objective when the bill comes to the Assembly, rather than reject it and, in doing so, also reject a recommendation of the royal commission and national panel of experts on reducing gendered violence. That would be a real shame. Mr Speaker, I would like to close by reaffirming how serious the crisis of gendered violence is. It will take everyone in this Assembly working together to end it.

MS BARRY (Ginninderra) (10.57): I thank the minister for her statement this morning on the government's response to domestic, family and sexual violence in the ACT. As I indicated in the chamber last week when we debated my motion, I think domestic and family violence is one issue that I consider to be apolitical. I think there is nobody in this place who would not want to see domestic and family violence rates reduced or even eradicated in totality. Mr Speaker, my comments to the minister's statement this morning are framed in the context of that purpose—the good faith, the scrutiny, and

aim to foster real improvements where we can make them because I strongly believe that eliminating domestic and family violence is a collective effort.

The minister has pointed out the work the government has done to develop a 10-year plan and a strategy to end domestic, family and sexual violence, and that plan is welcomed. It is very welcome. It sets out some parameters and guardrails. That plan would be underpinned by a series of short two- to three-year action plans, the first which we have seen. The minister has commented that the strategy represents a systemic shift in the territory's response to domestic violence.

While high aims and long-term thinking on this issue is certainly welcome, it is critical that we do not become complacent in the shadows of long-term thinking. Mr Speaker, my focus is to ensure that we do not give ourselves too much credit for plans alone. Plans alone do not deliver actions because, ultimately, strategies and plans are only as meaningful as the concrete steps we take to realise them. This is in large part why I felt compelled to bring the motion that I did last week to map domestic violence services in the ACT. We have a 10-year strategy on domestic violence, a two-year action plan and a $150 million funding commitment. But this is all before we have even mapped our city's domestic violence system to see where the critical gaps are and where the pressure points exist.

In a similar vein, I am somewhat concerned that some of the actions set out in the First Action Plan do not have concrete parameters and are not framed in terms of tangible outcomes. The question I keep asking myself every time I pick up a plan and I read it is, "What does that actually mean in practice and how will we operationalise that?" For example, one of the action plans which is claimed to represent a practical, high-impact action reads as follows:

> Scope potential future actions to challenge structural drivers of violence and shift norms, such as through addressing gender inequity, misogynistic attitudes, rigid gender norms, hierarchical ideas about sex, gender and sexuality, and intersecting forms of oppression and discrimination.

It starts with "scope potential future actions." Again, I have made this point during the budget estimates; we are planning to plan, and we have an action plan to plan. Mr Speaker, you can now appreciate why I am reluctant to give my unreserved commendation to these so-called action items, when they are framed in such broad terms without any concrete parameters. This matters because high ambition will make even the slightest difference on the ground to victim-survivors, to our frontline services, if we do not have the courage to do the work and pinpoint what our next steps are in practice.

The government is right in saying that it has committed significant taxpayer funding to address domestic, family and sexual violence over the next four years. But that is precisely why it is important that this funding is being injected into places where it is most needed and has the greatest impact. Funding alone will not reduce rates of domestic violence in our community. Funding channelled towards pressure points, gaps and practical solutions is what will make a difference. On this point, I strongly urge the government to continue to prioritise transparency around how the Safer Families Levy funding is being apportioned. In good faith, I will not discount the improvements that

the government has made on this front, following the Auditor-General's recommendation.

I want to touch on one last thing before I close in relation to the domestic and family violence information sharing scheme. I am glad that we are finally close to getting this over the line, but the delay is somewhat suboptimal. The first piece of legislation on information-sharing was passed in April 2024. It was due to commence a year later in 2025, but when that time came another piece of legislation was passed to delay commencement until November 2026. Now we have our third piece of legislation on information-sharing after it was determined that the existing legislation without further amendments may not operate effectively in practice.

Three iterations of this law and a 19-month delay in commencement is not something the government should be patting itself on the back about. The minister has this morning pointed to a series of steps that the government is ostensibly taking to improve the territory's response to domestic, family and sexual violence. I cannot think of a single issue that is more important to get right. Each of us have two short terms in this place to make a difference, and I hope that we can put those terms, those months, into practical use.

As I indicated, any time I pick up a plan I think about what it actually means in practice and what it does to the victims of domestic and family violence and how it impacts their life and how it potentially improves outcomes for them. So it was shocking to me when, last week, I was advised that there is a domestic and family violence safe house for First Nations women that was taken over by the government with no replacement. This was a service that supports 15 women who are experiencing domestic and family violence and the government took over that safe house and offered no replacement. I also understand that some of their belongings were taken from that accommodation and no support or replacement was offered to this organisation.

Once again, if we plan and we are really serious about supporting women experiencing, or people experiencing, domestic and family violence, I think it is really important that when issues like this exist that we solve them quickly and we resolve them quickly because it goes towards that commitment to end domestic and family violence. And if we are not doing that, it means that those commitments really are just words on paper. Once again, I thank the minister for her statement and I commend the statement to the Assembly.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Sport and recreation—Tuggeranong ice sports facility—order to table documents—documents tabled

Pursuant to order of the Assembly of 24 September 2026, the Clerk tabled the following documents:

> Index of returned documents.
>
> Interpretation of scope.
>
> Privilege claimed on certain returned documents—Letter to the Clerk from the

Chief Minister, dated 23 October 2026.

Returned documents (6 folders) (*see* Minutes of Proceedings Appendix 1).

Legal Affairs—Standing Committee
Amendment to reporting date

MS BARRY (Ginninderra) (11.05): I move:

> That, notwithstanding standing order 174(d), the Standing Committee on Legal Affairs shall present its report on the Domestic Violence Agencies Amendment Bill 2026 by the end of the first sitting week in 2027.

Mr Assistant Speaker, the Standing Committee on Legal Affairs has resolved to inquire into the Domestic Violence Agencies Amendment Bill 2026. Domestic and family violence remains an important issue for the ACT community. The community acknowledges the importance of the proposed changes to the Domestic and Family Violence Information Sharing Scheme, but is concerned about a potential gap in governance left by the dis-establishment of the Domestic Violence Prevention Council.

The committee is determined not to rush this inquiry, noting that, on the standing orders, the report would be due two days before Christmas—which would require the involvement of already-stretched stakeholders at a particularly busy time. An extension until the end of first sitting week in 2027 will give the committee enough time to give the bill and evidence presented to the committee the consideration that it deserves, prior to providing a report.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Economics, Industry and Recreation—Standing Committee
Amendment to reporting date

Motion (by **Mr Werner-Gibbings**) agreed to:

> That, notwithstanding standing order 174(d), the Standing Committee on Economics, Industry and Recreation shall present its report on the Gambling and Racing Control (Gambling Exclusion) Amendment Bill 2026 by 19 January 2027.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Legislative Assembly—standing order 122—amendment

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS (Brindabella) (11.07): I move:

> That standing order 122 be amended to omit the words "the redirection has been agreed to." and substitute "the redirection has been published through the Parliamentary Portal.".

This amendment to standing order 122 that I am moving today is the definition of a common-sense procedural change, and one that I have it on anecdotal, but good authority will spring tears of unbridled joy into the eyes of every DLO in this building.

Unamended, standing order 122 mandates that when a question on notice has been asked of minister without responsibility for the portfolio, the redirection request is sent to chamber support and then forwarded for approval by chamber support to the asking member. This must occur within 15 days of the question being published in the questions on notice paper.

In theory reasonable, in practice difficult—and becoming more so over the last six months, as the volume of questions without notice increases and thus the number of misdirected questions. Fifteen days is a short window of time for ministerial officers, chamber support and directorate liaison officers to identify the issue, seek approval and complete the process. An unforeseen or unavoidable delay to the process—as simple as a missed or unread email in a member's inbox—means that by the time redirection approval is received, the question is outside of the 15-day window and unable to be redirected from the inappropriate minister.

Questions on notice enable members to obtain information from the minister responsible for a particular area of government. If a question has been directed incorrectly, it makes sense that it should be transferred efficiently to the minister best placed to answer it. This amendment removes the requirement for approval by the asking MLA and instead, requires the redirection to be published to the parliamentary portal. The 30-day answer period will then run from the date that redirection is published.

Importantly, this change does not affect members' rights to ask questions, nor does it alter ministers' obligations to respond. It does make the process more efficient and transparent.

It also brings the arrangements for questions on notice into line with the approach already taken for questions without notice, and with the practice of the House of Representatives; both instances where the executive determines the appropriate minister to respond. Given the increased volume of questions in recent months, this is a practical and sensible reform that builds on the efficiencies to the questions on notice process adopted by the Speaker last week. I commend the motion to the Assembly.

MISS NUTTALL (Brindabella) (11.09): We cannot afford to get caught up in meaningless bureaucratic loops when matters of truth and justice are on the line. What would our honoured guest who just left the chamber, Spider-Man say?

On a serious note, the volumes of questions on notice have gone through the roof recently. When I saw the notice paper last week and how many questions on notice it contained, I was genuinely shocked and concerned. It spoke to the workload that has been put on chamber support, and why they have been asking for help. Please pour one out for chamber support, and for Bob Brown given the number of trees we lost to the brick of a notice paper.

The Speaker's office is making the backend changes to remove some of the blocks in their pipeline for processing questions, but this is the part that needs the standing order change. Redirection requests are overwhelmingly agreed to—pretty universally, I think, if we get to them in time—because I think we like the idea of getting better quality answers from the government. If we just assume that redirection is allowed, that is

several hundred emails that do not have to be sent, and everything gets a bit less cumbersome to handle. The Greens will be supporting this change.

MR COCKS (Murrumbidgee) (11.12): The Canberra Liberals will not be opposing this proposed change to standing orders. Indeed, we are hopeful that it may deliver faster turnaround on some of the questions that are lodged.

I do need to flag one concern though: because this does not change some of the provisions around timeframes, there is a risk that it could be abused. Now, we will be watching closely to make sure that it is not. It is our hope that this does do what it says on the tin, and it improves the timeframes and reduces the bureaucracy required to actually comply with the parliamentary process. But this is something that we will be watching closely and potentially having a look at through any review of standing orders in the future, as well.

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

Corrections—electronic monitoring of alleged offenders

MRS MORRIS (Brindabella) (11.13): I move:

> That, in accordance with standing order 213A, the Assembly orders the Minister for Corrections to provide the Assembly with:
>
> (1) a complete list of all studies, inquiries, reviews, consultations and outcomes which have been commissioned by the Government regarding the electronic monitoring scheme; and
>
> (2) all documents identified in part (1) and any associated ministerial briefs.

Personal safety is a fundamental right, and keeping the community safe, as I have said many times before, is one of the most basic responsibilities of government. In May 2024, the Chief Minister committed to introducing electronic monitoring in the ACT. He said, "certainly within the space of months, not years".

But, more than two years later, that promise has been abandoned for this term of government. The ACT remains the only jurisdiction in the country without electronic monitoring in operation. I suppose that is one way to be nation-leading, and we know this government likes to be nation-leading, but I would suggest that it is leading in all the wrong ways.

I remind members opposite that this commitment followed an urgent meeting of national cabinet to address the national crisis of violence against women. Electronic monitoring was part of this government's promised response.

For someone living with a threat of domestic violence, safety is not an abstract policy objective. It means being able to sleep at night without the fear of a violent offender arriving at their door. It means taking the children to school without having to look over their shoulder. It means having confidence that when an offender breaches an order, the system will respond.

Of course, electronic monitoring will not be perfect and without its faults, and it will

not prevent every offence, but it is a valuable tool to assist our police to monitor potentially violent offenders. That is a clear reason to properly examine how it could work here, what resources it would require and who it could help protect.

The government is now saying that this is just too expensive. This is why I have brought this order for papers before the Assembly; because we want to see the documentation that informed this decision, and scrutinise this claim.

What model did the government assess? How many offenders did it expect to monitor? What assumptions underpinned the projected costs? Did it properly consider a staged rollout, a more targeted scheme or a partnership with another jurisdiction? Did its assessment account for potential savings from reduced offending and imprisonment, alongside the benefits to victim safety?

These questions matter. We need to understand whether electronic monitoring is prohibitively expensive or whether the government has ruled it out on the basis of a particular model, without adequately assessing or testing the alternatives.

YWCA Canberra has claimed the government has put a price on women's safety. It is a pretty significant thing to say, and that criticism deserves a substantive response.

The government made this promise. It asked the community to believe that action was coming within months. It must now explain why, like so many times before, it has broken its word. I remain unconvinced by the explanation offered so far. If the government maintains that evidence justifies its decision, it should provide the documents so this Assembly can scrutinise that claim.

I thank Minister Tough for her engagement on this motion. I note some of the amendments that she has circulated, and I have subsequently circulated an amendment—which I believe has gone out, thank you very much.

The reason we have sought to amend Ms Tough's amendment, which I will just speak to now rather than later, is because ultimately through this request for the production of documents we would very much like to see the feasibility study that the government has referred to. And we have ACT government media reports that indicate that this feasibility study was undertaken before September 2024, which is why we have amended it to an earlier date of February 2024, so that we can capture that within the request.

We note the request for an extension of timeframe, and we have reluctantly agreed to that—hoping that a precedent will not be set in this place to have requests for such lengthy extensions of time on delivering the order for production of documents.

Thank you, Mr Assistant Speaker, and I commend my motion and amendment to the chamber.

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) (11.18), by leave: I move the following amendments together:

1. After all text in paragraph (1), insert: "since September 2024".
2. Add:

"(3) notwithstanding provisions of standing order 213A, material is to be provided by the first sitting week of 2027.".

As foreshadowed by Mrs Morris, the government is seeking to amend the motion this morning. I appreciate Mrs Morris bringing forward the motion, but I am going to touch on a few things about it. We are seeking to amend this motion simply because we discussed this very issue last week in this chamber and agreed unanimously that the government would come back to the Assembly on this issue in the first sitting next year. During debate last week on the motion Ms Barry brought to this chamber, which both Mr Emerson and Ms Vassarotti successfully amended, it was agreed that the government would develop and table in the first sitting week of 2027 a detailed feasibility assessment covering the rollout of electronic monitoring for domestic violence offences, the rollout of electronic monitoring for community based orders, and the costs of incarcerating offenders who may have otherwise been subjected to electronic monitoring.

I do not know whether Mrs Morris was not paying attention last Wednesday, particularly with all the amendments flying around, whether she was bored or whether she thought she may have missed the boat on this topic. Nonetheless, we did agree last Wednesday on an approach to release the feasibility information, and now, not even a week later, we are back here talking about electronic monitoring, with the opposition wanting information on feasibility, which is something that, because of Mr Emerson's amendment—albeit in the last minute—is coming in the first sitting week of next year.

I want to say clearly that the government does not oppose the release of these documents and I am supportive of sharing as much information on this topic as we can. Our amendments establish that we will provide the documents going back to 2024. I am completely supportive of Mrs Morris's amendment to change the date from September to February—I am just flagging in advance that it is fine—in line with the motion we agreed to last week. I appreciate that Mrs Morris is not going to amend my timeframe. That is what I understand. It means there will be no duplication of work and waste of resources. It gives my officials time to go through the documents and collate them all without them trying to do that in a sitting week and while preparing and then appearing at annual reports hearings.

I understand Mrs Morris's concerns about setting a precedent of giving extensions. I hope this is not setting a precedent, so I appreciate her agreeing with the timeframe of February. Sometimes extensions are needed, and this is one of those cases. Officials need time to check the documents and collate them. The amendments are needed because we will probably have to seek an extension anyway to get all these documents.

I reiterate: I am not opposed to the release of these documents. I just want to have the time that was agreed only last week in this chamber. There were discussions with my officials at the time and with people across the chamber as to why we could agree to reporting in February, as Mr Emerson's amendment suggested. If we were not supporting my amendments today and the timeframe and I could somehow get these

documents collated within 15 business days or the end of November, it would basically be responding to Mr Emerson's date of February anyway, but it would be just in the form of documents and we would not be able to put them together with a coherent statement to explain what is going on. I appreciate the extension to February, and I am supportive of these documents being released.

MS VASSAROTTI (Kurrajong) (11.22): I would like to thank Mrs Morris for bringing this motion to the chamber. As we discussed last week, the ACT Greens believe that electronic monitoring has potential beneficial uses in our justice system. 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 in the area of domestic and family violence, which we have been talking about today. If done, it should be used in conjunction with appropriate wraparound services.

As I noted, we spoke extensively last week about concerns around the government announcing that they were not introducing electronic monitoring at this time. Due to that, we worked around the motion. It is really pleasing that the government agreed to bring this issue back to the Assembly in the first sitting of 2027 and look at the issues around feasibility. For that purpose, we support the amendments that have been brought to the chamber, particularly in relation to extending the timeframe to 2027. Also, we recognise the importance of ensuring the documentation is captured, so broadening the scope to February 2024 is also something that the Greens will support.

MRS MORRIS (Brindabella) (11.24): I move the amendment circulated in my name:

> Omit "September 2024", substitute: "February 2024".

I take this opportunity to make some additional comments, if I may. There was reference to an amendment that Mr Emerson put to Ms Barry's motion last week, and I sincerely hope that the minister is not putting the wrong interpretation on the request for the order of documents that we have placed today. Mr Emerson's amendment specifically asked the government to develop and table a detailed feasibility assessment covering a number of items. That is effectively asking the government to present their own assessment of work that they have undertaken without having any transparency over the work that was undertaken. My request specifically goes to the documents that formed the basis for this decision. Mr Emerson's amendment wanted you to put an analysis on those documents and present it. We are asking for two different things.

I think the public deserves to know, and this chamber deserves to know, what was actually in that feasibility study and all other documents. Mr Emerson's amendment did not call for any of that to be presented to this place. When we are talking about an issue of significant community concern which has understandably upset many people and stakeholders in the community, the community has a right to know what was in those documents, not the government's assessment, which they can make one way or another to support their position and which people cannot scrutinise.

With respect, these are actually two very different things—that which Mr Emerson put forward and that which I am putting forward today. If the minister is going to come back with a response that only honours Mr Emerson's request from last week, that is

not in the spirit of this OPD. I would encourage her to think very seriously about that. I hope that my amendment can be supported by the chamber.

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) (11.26): I just want to reiterate some points I made in moving my amendment. I am not opposed to the release of these documents; I am fine with the release of all the documents. By aligning with Mr Emerson's amendment last week, those documents will come out at the same time as what we are preparing, so everyone will have all that stuff in one go. We are not opposing the release of these documents; we are fine with that. By aligning it with what we already committed to last week, everything comes out at once and everyone can make their own assessment.

They are still our documents, though. Even what has already been prepared to date was prepared for the government, so they still have our own assessment on them. They are our documents. I am not opposed to releasing them. I just want to be really clear with everyone in the chamber that we are not opposed to releasing the documents. We are aligning the timeframes because we were already working on releasing a response to what Mr Emerson called for in the first week of February. I just want to make it really clear: we actually welcome the release of these documents.

Mrs Morris: They are two separate issues.

MS TOUGH: They are two separate but related issues. We are not interpreting the motion under standing order 213A as responding to Mr Emerson's motion; we are just having them happen at the same time.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Mrs Morris's amendment to Ms Tough's proposed amendments agreed to.

Ms Tough's amendments, as amended, agreed to.

Original question, as amended, agreed to.

Justice and Community Safety Legislation Amendment Bill 2026 (No 2)

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

Title read by Clerk.

MS CHEYNE (Ginninderra—Manager of Government Business, Attorney-General, Minister for City and Government Services, and Minister for Transport) (11.30): I move:

> That this bill be agreed to in principle.

I am pleased to present this bill to the Assembly. It makes amendments across three pieces of justice system legislation to improve their operation. It is an omnibus bill that makes targeted amendments to several acts to improve the practical operation of the territory's justice system to support effective administration and to ensure legislative frameworks remain fit for purpose. The bill makes minor and technical amendments to laws falling primarily within my portfolios as Attorney-General and to a statute within the portfolio of the Minister for the Arts, Creative Industries and the Night-time Economy. The bill will improve the ACT's justice and community safety legislation to ensure it continues to meet the community's expectations of a fair, effective and modern justice system.

This bill will amend the Magistrates Court Act 1930 to allow the Chief Magistrate to declare more than one magistrate as an Industrial Court Magistrate. This reform is a practical response to the growth in the industrial and work safety matters before the court. Allowing more than one Industrial Court Magistrate will provide greater flexibility in listing and case management; it will reduce delays; and it will ensure that matters are dealt with efficiently and without unnecessary disruption to parties. Established in 2013 within the ACT Magistrates Court, the Industrial Court has jurisdiction to deal with industrial and work safety matters, as well as related personal actions, including personal injury claims.

The current legislative framework only allows the Chief Magistrate to declare one magistrate as an Industrial Court Magistrate. However, the current workload has exceeded the capacity of a single Industrial Court Magistrate, resulting in significant delays. By mid-2026, the Industrial Court had already dealt with more matters than were heard during the entirety of the previous year. It is expected that this trend will continue in the foreseeable future. Amending the act to enable the Chief Magistrate to declare additional Industrial Court Magistrates will support the efficient and timely administration of the court's workload and improve access to justice for Canberrans.

The bill will also amend the Crimes (Restorative Justice) Act 2004 to promote restorative justice practice in the ACT. Restorative justice is a process that gives people who have caused harm and those who have been harmed an opportunity to come together in conversation. The use of de-identified case studies helps build understanding, trust and confidence in restorative justice processes. It also supports practitioner training and accreditation, and it provides referring agencies with greater insight into the operation and benefits of the scheme, which in turn support informed referrals where restorative justice is appropriate.

Importantly, these amendments do not weaken existing privacy protections. Information must be de-identified and may only be used for specific purposes, including education, training, professional accreditation and reporting. The amendments will allow de-identified case studies to be presented at restorative justice information and education sessions with entities who refer matters for restorative justice and support services. This will highlight both the restorative justice process and the benefits of the restorative justice program. The amendments will allow de-identified case studies to be included in the director-general's annual report. Together, these measures will improve understanding of restorative justice and support the continued development of a skilled restorative justice sector.

Finally, the bill will amend the Liquor Act 2010, in the Minister for Arts, Creative Industries and the Night-time Economy portfolio, to discontinue the Liquor Advisory Board. The Liquor Advisory Board was established to provide advice on the operation and effectiveness of the Liquor Act and on measures that support harm minimisation and community safety in relation to the sale, supply, promotion and consumption of liquor. Having reviewed the operation of the board, we consider that project-specific consultation processes provide a much more flexible and effective means of obtaining stakeholder input on liquor policy matters.

Further stakeholder engagement will continue through those consultation mechanisms, as has been now well established. The approach is consistent with arrangements used in many other Australian jurisdictions, which rely on liquor accords, industry reference groups and local- or issue-specific consultation processes, rather than having a standing advisory body, which may be meeting even when it has no business. The government will continue to engage with the community stakeholders and experts to inform liquor policy and future reform. I have reached out to members, or we are in the process of reaching out to members, to brief them. I know that this Assembly has some reticence when it comes to the government's approach to modernising our consultation arrangements. We certainly hope to get some support for this one, given that it is eminently sensible.

While modest in scope, the amendments in this bill will deliver practical benefits to the operation of the ACT's justice system and strengthen outcomes for the community. They will assist the courts to manage growing workloads, support a greater understanding of restorative justice practices and modernise consultation arrangements under the Liquor Act. Collectively, the amendments demonstrate the government's commitment to maintaining a responsive, effective and contemporary legislative framework that meets the needs of the ACT community. I commend the bill to the Assembly.

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

Legal Affairs—Standing Committee
Scrutiny report 24

MS BARRY (Ginninderra) (11.37):

I present the following report:

> Legal Affairs—Standing Committee (Legislative Scrutiny Role)—Scrutiny Report 24, dated 26 October 2026, together with extracts of the relevant minutes of proceedings—

I seek leave to make a brief statement.

Leave granted.

MS BARRY: Scrutiny report 24 contains the committee's comments on 12 pieces of subordinate legislation, proposed amendments to one bill and five regulatory impact

statements.

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

Firearms (Firearm Prohibition Orders) Amendment Bill 2026

Debate resumed from 24 February 2026, on motion by **Dr Paterson**:

> That this bill be agreed to in principle.

MRS MORRIS (Brindabella) (11.38): One of the most fundamental duties of government is to keep the community safe, and that means striking the right balance of community safety while upholding the fundamental principles of justice and procedural fairness. That is why the Canberra Liberals have long supported the introduction of firearm prohibition orders, and we took it to the 2024 ACT election as part of our plan for a safer Canberra.

Firearm prohibition orders will provide a preventive and targeted tool in our ongoing effort to disrupt organised crime and dismantle the networks of violence in our communities and domestic violence in homes. I wish it were the case that firearm prohibition orders were not necessary. But the reality is that these laws are needed, because there is a sophisticated footprint of organised crime in Canberra, where we have seen a resurgence of outlaw motorcycle gangs who have set up shop in our home. OMCGs have a serious footprint in transnational, domestic and local organised crime, primarily driven by illicit firearm and drug trafficking, illicit tobacco trafficking, financial crimes, extortion, violence, conspiracy to murder and murder. Since 2009, when the New South Wales government introduced anti-consorting laws, Canberra has seen an explosion of outlaw bikie gangs and the violence that comes with them. We have seen bikie gangs come to Canberra en masse to hold their annual meetings, where they can organise their crimes and recruit members to their movements. This not only undermines community safety but also places a significant strain on police resources that are already stretched desperately thin.

Our Chief Police Officer, Scott Lee, has reported that Canberra is now home to five outlaw bikie gangs. The growing number of gangs and members risks erupting into gang turf warfare in our suburbs. Canberra has seen gun violence in our suburbs—shots fired into homes, shots fired outside the daycare centres—and I fear that it is just a matter of time before an innocent Canberran is caught in the crossfire and killed. It is why one of our former Chief Police Officers, Justine Saunders, said outlaw bikie gang violence was something that kept her up at night. Despite the very best efforts of our police, criminal bikie gangs have had a very good run in Canberra because our legislative setting has made us a soft target—so much so that gang members themselves have described Canberra as a "safe haven'. A Fink's associate said:

> Canberra has become a safe haven for bikies, and the Finks were the first to exploit this. It's literally happening under the government's nose, but nothing is being done.

We should be very worried about the direction our city is heading in when criminals

describe Canberra as a safe haven, while at the same time victims of crime and members in the community are increasingly describing Canberra as unsafe. There is a perversion there that needs to be addressed and cannot go unaccounted. The hard truth is that these reforms are both necessary and overdue. They are necessary because everyone deserves to live in safety and free from the fear of gun violence.

For years, our police have been asked to keep the community safe from organised crime with their hands tied behind their back. These laws, we believe, are targeted and proportionate and they will allow police to prevent and disrupt gun violence before it occurs. By prohibiting high-risk individuals associated with violent or organised crime from owning, possessing or being in the proximity to firearms, we reduce the risk of violent escalation before the trigger is ever pulled. We must be very clear about the intended target of these laws. They are squarely targeted at individuals who have a history of domestic violence or organised crime and who have been considered by a magistrate to represent a significantly high risk to the community. Police would be given power to undertake searches of such individuals to ensure compliance with the order.

The Canberra Liberals consider firearm prohibition orders to be proportionate and subject to reasonable safeguards, accountability and oversight. The FPO would be court ordered by application of the Chief Police Officer; it would be subject to ombudsman review; and it would be subject to ministerial review after it has been in operation for three years to assess whether it is achieving its desired outcome without an unintended consequence, with a report required to be presented on its operation to the Legislative Assembly. The Canberra Liberals have considered the need for an FPO scheme, and we believe that the need is strong. We have considered the approach taken by the government. We acknowledge that there are some in our community who believe these laws actually do not go far enough, while at the same time there are some in our community who believe that these laws go too far.

No legislation is perfect. We have approached this in good faith, and I have come to the view that this legislation has sought to strike the right balance between community safety, justice and procedural fairness. That is why we will be supporting this bill. Annual reporting to the Assembly, independent ombudsman oversight and the statutory review after three years will allow us to examine these powers and how they operate and whether, through that process, there might be a need to come back and address any challenges that might arise from that. If problems emerge, they should be addressed. That is what scrutiny and review are for. Every Australian jurisdiction already has an FPO scheme in operation. We are late to the party. It is overdue—but, that said, late is better than never. We will be closely examining the application of this scheme to determine whether it gives police sufficient powers to prevent and disrupt violent and organised crime and also to ensure justice is upheld and procedural fairness is maintained.

This is a welcome step forward, but it is not the end and cannot be the end to tackling organised crime. The message must be unmistakable and heard loud and clear by any of those who seek to cause harm and engage in violent and organised crime: Canberra is closed for business to organised crime.

MS VASSAROTTI (Kurrajong) (11.47): This is a bill that proposes to introduce

significant new police powers to the ACT. These take the form of firearms prohibition orders, or FPOs. Under the proposal, FPOs could be issued by a court and would prohibit a person from acquiring, possessing or using a firearm or firearm-related item while the order was in force. I will not go into all the details of the bill, such as the application process, the ability to appeal the order or for there to be interim orders. Those have been examined by a committee already and are explained in detail in the explanatory material and the minister's statements. While acknowledging that the government has tried hard to balance the issues in this bill, we do not think they have got it quite right.

The overarching objective of the FPO scheme is good, which is to improve community safety by ensuring that high-risk individuals cannot use clandestine means to acquire firearms. However, the way the bill is drafted provides police with significant powers to confirm that a person who is subject to an FPO has not contravened the FPO. This includes, for example, the ability to search a person and search their premises and seize items, and it proposes that these powers can be exercised by police without a warrant. Under the government's proposal, all that is required for police to exercise these powers of search, seizure et cetera is their assessment that the power is "reasonably required" to ascertain whether a person has acquired, possesses or is using a firearm or related item in contravention of that FPO.

We can imagine how this could be used. In fact, we may not need to imagine at all, because we see how it has been used in other jurisdictions already. I will talk about that more in a moment. Essentially, once a person is subject to an FPO, the police have extraordinary powers to search and seize, even without a reasonable suspicion that the FPO has been breached. FPOs can be in place for up to three years, during which police can repeatedly use these powers.

Members will have seen the Human Rights Commission raise concerns about these extraordinary powers. The commission said that it did not consider that the proposed safeguards in the bill are sufficient to remedy the underlying risk that these powers will unlawfully limit the right not to be subjected to unlawful or arbitrary interferences with privacy, family, home or correspondence, or other rights protected by the Human Rights Act. The commission recommended that the exercise of search and other enforcement powers concerning an FPO should instead be premised on a reasonable suspicion that the subject has contravened the FPO. Essentially, the commission is saying that the powers afforded to police to use powers such as search and seizure are too broad. It is a fundamental safeguard that, before police can exercise a search and seizure power, they should obtain a warrant or have reasonable suspicion of the commission of an offence. It is a long-standing protection. This bill proposes to erode that standard that we all expect as a basic safeguard.

I flag now that the Greens are proposing amendments that require the exercise of police enforcement powers to be based on reasonable suspicion. I will formally raise these amendments during the detail stage of the debate. The ACT is a human rights jurisdiction with a Human Rights Act, and we have that act for a reason. It is to protect all citizens and to ensure that powers are not used inappropriately. As the Human Rights Commissioner, Penelope Mathew, wrote in the *Canberra Times* last week:

> Human rights are no barrier to sensible, evidence-based reforms appropriate in a

> liberal democracy. They protect individuals from government overreach.

The commissioner also gave examples of how police exercise their powers. She referenced the exercise of police powers in respect to Dissent Cafe and Bar. She also referenced more concerning examples, highlighting the need for strengthened human rights protection when it comes to our police force—for example, the Ombudsman's report *It's not him*", which concerned a young Aboriginal person arrested on a bus and then searched, despite knowledge that he was not the suspect.

We can look to other jurisdictions that have introduced similar FPO powers, with a threshold for police enforcement powers similar to that proposed by the government. Reviews of both the Victorian FPO scheme and the New South Wales scheme found there had been misuse of FPO search powers by police officers. Vulnerable people, such as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, were disproportionately and unjustifiably targeted by those police powers. Various civil liberty bodies in New South Wales, Victoria and Queensland have raised concerns about both the misuse and the potential misuse of these powers under the scheme.

Let me provide some further details on the way in which police have exercised these powers in other jurisdictions. In 2016, the New South Wales Ombudsman found there had been a misuse of the FPO search powers by police officers in that state. It noted that police discovered a firearm or related item in only two per cent of all search events, and nothing was seized in 90 per cent of search events. Legal Aid NSW reported that it is aware of continued misuse of the FPO-related police powers in that jurisdiction. The NSW and ACT Aboriginal Legal Service reported that, in its experience, FPOs led to frequent searches of individuals and their properties in circumstances where there was no basis to suspect that they were in possession of a firearm.

The Law Society of New South Wales raised concerns about the operation of New South Wales FPO search powers, stating that, in 2022-23, statistics show that almost 10,000 FPO searches were conducted under the FPO regime, with just nine resulting in the location of firearms or firearms accessories and attachments. These findings cause the Law Society to have significant concerns about the utility of these search powers protecting the community from firearm-related crime. There is a statistic from Victoria. According to data obtained by the Racial Profiling Data Monitoring Project, the hit rate of FPOs is almost half the hit rate of searches conducted where reasonable grounds are required. This provides evidence that they are being used on spurious grounds.

In the context of this debate, where we are talking about giving extraordinary powers to police, I refer members to reporting in the *Canberra Times* today. This provides an example of powers that police already have and how they may be used effectively. The report says that ACT Policing has executed eight search warrants across Canberra, with the arrest of four men and the seizure of 13 weapons. It is an example of clear and effective use of police powers that are protecting the community while not raising the kinds of problematic issues I have been discussing.

When introducing FPO legislation in Victoria, the Victorian minister accepted that the equivalent provisions in that legislation—the provisions affording extraordinary search powers to Victorian police where reasonably required—were incompatible with human rights. The minister acknowledged they are incompatible with the human rights act in

Victoria. The standard that should be in place for the exercise of search and other enforcement powers concerning an FPO is a reasonable suspicion that the subject has contravened the FPO. This is a regular and reasonable standard, and it alleviates the kinds of misuse issues I referred to earlier.

This is where it gets a bit strange. I note that the Canberra Liberals' shadow attorney-general, Ms Barry, also recognised the need for the improved standard in her published comments as chair of the Standing Committee on Legal Affairs. Ms Barry wrote in her report that the risk of overreach and abuse of power should be given serious consideration. She commented:

> At a minimum, the 'reasonably required' test—

that is, a weaker test than the bill currently contains—

> risks encouraging vexatious complaints. At worst, it potentially provides a backdoor to wider and more general warrantless searches. More likely, it puts further pressure on police resources that are already constrained.

Ms Barry concludes—wisely, in the opinion of the Greens:

> … should the proposed scheme proceed, it would be prudent to adopt the 'reasonable suspicion' test … I urge the government to reconsider the applicable test …

I suggest that the amendments that I am proposing should get support in the chamber today. Ms Barry makes strong points. The issues that the Greens are raising have been raised before and are clearly understood and acknowledged. The amendments that the Greens propose to the bill would change section 183ZW(2) so that the standard required for a police officer to exercise their FPO enforcement powers is that the officer suspects, on reasonable grounds, that the person subject to an FPO has acquired, possesses or is using a firearm or firearm-related item in contravention of that FPO. That is a key change. Instead of the exercise of power being reasonably required, the police officer must have a reasonable suspicion. This is a sound and sensible change that balances rights and ensures fundamental safeguards remain in place.

I acknowledge that, compared to other jurisdictions, the bill proposes to introduce FPOs with some additional safeguards. This includes the requirement that an FPO is initially issued by a court. A range of reporting requirements is also proposed, as well as the requirement for ombudsman review. These are important safeguards. The ACT scheme improves on some schemes in other jurisdictions; however, they are not sufficient to alleviate the significant concerns that I have outlined. As I have said, it is the position of the Human Rights Commission and it is the position of the shadow attorney-general, as expressed in her committee report comments.

Also, I remind the Assembly that ACT Policing officers are not covered under the ACT Discrimination Act or the Human Rights Commission Act's complaints provisions. That heightens the concern about the amount of discretion and power that the FPOs bill would give to police. These could be alleviated by bringing ACT Policing under the jurisdiction of these ACT acts. We will have a situation where the government is giving these significant powers to ACT Policing, yet our protective ACT institution, the

Human Rights Commission, cannot provide oversight or hear complaints.

Lastly, as part of the overall consideration of the human rights implications of this bill, I want to highlight that the bill contains numerous strict liability offences. The ACT's guide for framing offences emphasises that strict liability needs to be used cautiously and primarily for regulatory offences as it removes the need to prove fault, so it limits the presumption of innocence. Clear justification is especially needed if a strict liability offence proposes a term of imprisonment of over six months. The scrutiny committee has requested the minister justify the strict liability offences in the bill and has noted that there is still no clear justification for providing a maximum penalty beyond six months for the new offences. I put this on the record as further context concerning the scope of the FPOs bill.

To conclude, the Greens recognise the importance of community safety and the importance of restricting guns and preventing their illegal and dangerous use. Our amendment ensures that the police use their enforcement only while subject to reasonable and long-held safeguards.

DR PATERSON (Murrumbidgee—Minister for Health, Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Police, Fire and Emergency Services, and Minister for Gaming Reform) (12.02), in reply: I thank the Standing Committee on Legal Affairs for their work during the inquiry into the legislation on firearms reform, and I thank members for expressing their views on this really important reform today. The inquiry informed the government's position on the bill and the amendments that I will move today.

This bill is a critical step in strengthening the ACT's firearms laws and will give police a new tool to disrupt organised crime. Firearms-related violence and illicit firearms markets are matters of critical concern for this government and for the nation. Nationally, everyone was shocked and saddened by the devastating events at Bondi last year, with harrowing echoes of the Port Arthur massacre. Following the Port Arthur massacre, Australia created the National Firearms Agreement. The Bondi attack highlights the need to further strengthen our firearms laws.

In 2022, the Australian Criminal Intelligence Commission estimated that there are around 260,000 firearms in illicit markets in Australia. This estimate is conservative. With developments in technology and demand for privately manufactured weapons, the true figure is likely much higher. Organised criminal activity is of real concern to our community. Since the emergence of a second outlaw motorcycle gang in the ACT in 2014, there has been an increase in reported firearms offences. ACT Policing also continue to seize illicit and unregistered firearms in their response to firearms-related crime. In 2024, ACT Policing took possession of 519 firearms, including unregistered firearms. In 2025, ACT Policing seized more than 2,000 firearms and firearms parts, associated with breaches of the law.

Just last week, ACT Policing participated in Operation Athena, comprising police forces from Australia and New Zealand, as well as commonwealth agencies, which ran from 19 to 25 October. Police executed search warrants across Evatt, Denman Prospect, Reid, Belconnen, Phillip, Gilmore, Chisholm and Hackett. Four men were arrested and charged with 14 offences relating to possessing firearms, drugs, and other prohibited weapons. Police undertook 36 compliance checks of registered firearms owners,

resulting in two licence cancellations and the seizure of six firearms.

The ACT government recognises concerns relating to organised crime. ACT Policing works closely with interstate policing partners, law enforcement, intelligence agencies and other stakeholders across the country and internationally to maximise the impact of disruption to organised crime and illicit profit-making enterprises in the ACT. As at 12 October 2026, there had been nine known large-scale national OMCG meetings and group motorcycle rides in the territory since January 2024. ACT Policing has observed an increase in local activity by known OMCG members. The most recent meeting was held on the 10 to 11 October weekend, where officers led by Taskforce Invidia monitored the gathering of the Comanchero OMCG group in the ACT.

Through targeted operations that ACT Policing have, they continue to disrupt OMCG-linked criminal activity, including alleged drug trafficking and organised crime offending. These operations demonstrate the value of intelligence-led policing and close cooperation with law enforcement partners across jurisdictions. In August 2026, ACT Police executed a series of search warrants and enforcement activities, resulting in seven arrests and seizure of suspected commercial quantities of illicit drugs, firearms, cash and other assets. ACT Policing alleges the group had been involved in trafficking more than 70 kilograms of cocaine, with an estimated street value exceeding $10 million. In March 2026, I announced that the ACT government was drafting legislation to ban members of outlaw motorcycle gangs from wearing or displaying items that signify gang membership. This will be introduced in the next sitting. The reform seeks to ban the public display of OMCG insignia, including patches, logos and other insignia where it is used to identify membership, intimidate the community or recruit new members.

ACT firearms legislation places strict controls on who may hold a firearm, how they may use it and how it must be stored to ensure it does not fall into the wrong hands. These are critical given the potentially deadly consequences when firearms are misused or in the wrong hands. I emphasise that most firearms owners in the ACT are lawful actors in a complex regulatory environment and use firearms for legitimate activities, including competitive shooting, business and primary production. However, there are a small number of individuals for whom access to firearms presents unacceptable risks to the safety of our community, including individuals involved in organised crime, domestic violence perpetrators and violent extremists. Existing controls are insufficient to address risks posed by these cohorts. Stronger measures, including direct prohibitions on accessing firearms and proactive monitoring of compliance, are required.

All other states and territories have a firearms prohibition order scheme, or FPO scheme, in place. Passage of this bill will bring the ACT in line with other jurisdictions and make a strong contribution to ACT and national efforts to address firearms-related harms. The FPO scheme allows the Magistrates Court to make an order prohibiting a person from possessing or using firearms or from entering places firearms may be stored. Police will have new powers to confirm compliance with an order, enabling early intervention to prevent harms before they occur.

The scheme introduces numerous robust guardrails to ensure FPOs are not made without careful consideration of the impacts on rights and freedoms and ensure the powers conferred by these laws are not exercised arbitrarily. The bill also makes

provision for oversight of the scheme, including reporting to the ombudsman and the minister and a requirement that the operation of the scheme be reviewed after three years. This will ensure impediments to the just and effective operation of the scheme are addressed as effectively as possible.

I will move a number of amendments to the bill today which respond to recommendations from the legal affairs committee and concerns from identified stakeholders. The first set of amendments increases the frequency of police reporting to the Ombudsman on the operation of the scheme, thereby enhancing oversight. It will also remove a requirement to provide the Ombudsman with copies of FPOs, which had been identified as being of little practical value. This responds to recommendation 10 of the committee's report.

The second set of amendments removes the requirement for the Registrar of the Magistrates Court to serve a notice of response to the application for a final FPO to the Chief Police Officer when the response is filed with the court by the respondent. Instead, the respondent will be required to effect the service. This brings amendments for service under the FPO scheme in line with ordinary civil procedures. This responds to concerns raised by the Magistrates Court in relation to impacts of the requirement of the registrar to serve a notice.

This bill is one of several measures the government is progressing to address firearms related violence. As members will be aware, the landscape of public safety is dynamic. Earlier this year, we introduced the Firearms (Public Safety) Amendment Bill. This proposes to limit the number of firearms a person may hold and re-categorise certain firearms, and introduces the express prohibition on the possession of blueprints for computer-aided manufacture of firearms. On 22 August, I announced the ACT's participation in the National Gun Buyback Scheme, with exact details of the scheme to follow. We also have significant work underway on the National Firearms Register. On 26 August, the Chief Minister joined other first ministers in signing the updated National Firearms Agreement. Government continues to work on further reforms, including the ACT's participation in the National Firearms Register.

In closing, I reiterate the importance of this bill in protecting our community from the often catastrophic and tragic impacts of firearms-related violence. I commend the bill to the Assembly.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Detail stage

Clauses 1 to 13, by leave, taken together.

MS VASSAROTTI (Kurrajong) (12.12): I will quickly make some comments about the government amendments as a whole. I wish to briefly discuss the circulated amendments of the government and note that the Greens will be supporting these amendments. Some of these amendments strengthen scrutiny and accountability of the scheme, which we support. One amendment does require the CPO to report to the ACT Ombudsman on a quarterly basis on FPOs and the exercise of warrantless search and seizure powers. That is an improvement on the current drafting that would only require

this annually. Another amendment requires the minister, as part of the statutory review of the effectiveness of the scheme, to consult with the Ombudsman in relation to the operation of this quarterly reporting requirement. The other amendments are procedural and administrative improvements, which we also support.

MS CARRICK (Murrumbidgee) (12.13): I acknowledge the objective of keeping firearms out of the hands of people who pose a risk to the community. There is broad support for strong action against organised crime, firearm trafficking, serious violence and domestic and family violence. I support the government's amendments to the bill.; however, the question is how we strike the right balance between community safety and fundamental legal protections.

The government argues that firearm prohibition orders are intended to be preventative and that traditional policing powers can be insufficient where intelligence exists about a risk but has not yet reached the threshold required for ordinary search powers. I acknowledge that argument. Police and frontline agencies face difficult and evolving challenges, and parliament should provide them with effective tools to protect the community. However, the bill, as drafted, grants warrantless search powers. A person subject to a firearm prohibition order may have their home, vehicle and other premises searched where an officer considers the search to be reasonably required to determine compliance. That is a lower threshold than the traditional standard of reasonable suspicion that has long existed as an important safeguard in our legal system. I am concerned that such a significant departure from ordinary protections risks undermining the balance that should exist between public safety and individual rights.

The bill itself acknowledges impacts on privacy, freedom of movement, freedom of association and other human rights. Those limitations may be justified in some circumstances but, where parliament is conferring powers of this breadth, we should ensure appropriate safeguards remain in place. I believe the Greens' amendments improve the legislation by introducing a well-established and familiar safeguard, requiring police to suspect on reasonable grounds before exercising those powers. This threshold is important to prevent misuse of these powers, while still allowing police to take preventative action against high-risk individuals. I accept that some will argue that this may make the scheme less powerful, but I do not accept that effective policing and basic legal safeguards are mutually exclusive. A reasonable suspicion threshold has long been recognised as an appropriate threshold for significant intrusions into personal privacy.

I support the objective of the firearm prohibition order scheme, and I support giving police tools to prevent firearm offending before tragedy occurs. But I also believe parliament has a responsibility to ensure those powers are exercised within a framework that protects fundamental rights and maintains public confidence in the law. For that reason, I will support the Greens' amendments. I believe they represent a sensible compromise to support the removal of the need for a warrant but preserve the important safeguard of reasonable suspicion before people's homes are searched.

Clauses 1 to 13 agreed to.

Clause 14.

DR PATERSON (Murrumbidgee—Minister for Health, Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Police, Fire and Emergency Services, and Minister for Gaming Reform) (12.17): I move amendment No 1 circulated in my name *[see schedule 1 at page 3697]* and table a supplementary explanatory statement to the amendments.

I will not go into the detail of this, given the timing, but this amendment replaces the requirement for the Registrar—which I spoke about in my previous speech—at the Magistrate's Court to effect service and aligns requirements for service with usual arrangements and civil proceedings.

Dr Paterson's amendment No 1 agreed to.

MS VASSAROTTI (Kurrajong) (12.17): I seek leave to move together amendments to this bill that have not been circulated in accordance with standing order 178A.

Leave granted.

MS VASSAROTTI: I move amendments Nos 1 to 4 circulated in my name together *[see schedule 2 at page 3699]* and table a supplementary explanatory statement.

As I detailed in my earlier speech, the amendments that the Greens propose to the bill will change section 183ZW(2) so that the standard required for a police officer to exercise their FPO enforcement powers is that the officer suspects, on reasonable grounds, that the person subject to the FPO has acquired possession or is using a firearm or firearm-related item in contravention of that FPO. As noted, it is a key change. Instead of exercising powers being reasonably required, the police officer must have a reasonable suspicion. As I have noted, it is the position of the Human Rights Commission that they have advocated for and also the position that was taken by the shadow Attorney-General. It is a sound and sensible change that balances rights and ensures fundamental safeguards remain in place.

I also note that the updated explanatory statement responds to feedback provided from the Scrutiny Committee at their last meeting and provides some additional explanations.

DR PATERSON (Murrumbidgee—Minister for Health, Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Police, Fire and Emergency Services, and Minister for Gaming Reform) (12.19): The government does not support the proposed amendments by Ms Vassarotti to the Firearms Amendment Bill. The amendments proposed would align the threshold for the exercise of police search and seizure powers under the FPO scheme with the current threshold for general police powers of entry search and seizure.

Existing general police powers of entry, search and seizure typically require an officer to form a reasonable suspicion that a person has committed or will commit a crime or has something unlawful in their possession. In the government's view, while their threshold of reasonable suspicion reflects a responsive approach to policing, it is insufficient to address risks posed by high-risk individuals, who are the primary targets of the FPO order.

The overarching objective of the firearms prohibition order scheme is to protect the community from risks associated with a small cohort of high-risk individuals having

access to firearms. This is achieved by providing police with additional tools to respond to and prevent gun crime, including by enhancing police powers to conduct searches in certain circumstances. Examples of high-risk individuals include people who present very high risks of engaging in domestic violence, who have established criminal connections with organised groups and gangs, or who have expressed extreme and violent views towards public figures and agencies. These individuals may use clandestine and sophisticated methods to hide weapons.

The threshold currently in the bill requires police to form a view that search and seizure is reasonably required to allow police to confirm the person has not acquired or is not in possession of a firearm or related item. This provides for proactive intervention and action by police, preventing and deterring criminal activity involving firearms at an early stage and thereby reducing the threat of firearm-related violence and crime. Requiring a reasonable suspicion test, as proposed by Ms Vassarotti's amendments, would make the FPO scheme operationally unworkable from a police perspective and would not achieve the objective of the legislation to protect the community from firearm violence.

The government is very confident that there are safeguards in the bill to ensure these powers will not be exercised arbitrarily by police. The government is satisfied that this bill mitigates any human rights concerns and risk of the arbitrary use of these powers. On this basis, the amendments proposed by Ms Vassarotti are not supported by the government.

MRS MORRIS (Brindabella) (12.22): The Canberra Liberals will not be supporting these amendments. We note the concerns of the Greens, as reflected in their amendments, and those of the chair of the legal affairs committee through their inquiry into the bill. It is important that these concerns are heard and tested through the application of the law and subsequent review processes that are embedded in this bill. Our primary duty as legislators is to keep the community safe while upholding those fundamental principles of justice and procedural fairness. While we understand these concerns that have been raised, our concern with the proposal is that it would undermine the intent of this legislation and effectively make it unworkable. It could put police into a situation where they cannot act to disrupt potential gun violence even when they have credible intelligence alerting them to the risk.

By design, this bill is preventative; it is intended to disrupt gun violence before a trigger can be pulled; it is targeted at high-risk individuals with a history of domestic violence and organised crime—this is something that would be tested by the Chief Police Officer and a magistrate; and its application would be subject to ombudsman review and would also be subject to ministerial review. If problems do arise, then we can and we should fix them. We take this position in good faith that, if concerns do unfold, they will be assessed and dealt with accordingly by this Assembly.

In striking a balance, the Assembly must recognise the Australia-wide problem of organised crime and domestic violence. These are problems that have been recognised over and over by the highest levels of government, including national cabinet, and by parliaments across Australia, including this parliament—issues that we have discussed over and over again. There has been considerable bipartisan support on taking action against domestic violence and, as we are seeing today, on organised crime.

Ms Vassarotti's amendments Nos 1 to 4 negatived.

DR PATERSON (Murrumbidgee—Minister for Health, Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Police, Fire and Emergency Services, and Minister for Gaming Reform) (12.25), by leave: I move amendments Nos 2 to 5 as circulated in my name together *[see schedule 1 at page 3697]*.

I reaffirm that these recommendations and amendments are in response to recommendation 10 of the inquiry into the legislation on the firearms reform undertaken by the Assembly's standing committee.

Dr Paterson's amendments Nos 2 to 5 agreed to.

Clause 14, as amended, agreed to

Remainder of the bill, by leave, taken as a whole and agreed to.

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

Bill, as amended, agreed to.

MR ASSISTANT SPEAKER: Just quickly, before we suspend, it has been brought to my attention that some members and staff have taken photos of the public gallery this morning and posted them online. I remind members that broadcasts and photos of the public gallery are not generally permitted and I ask that these posts be removed.

Sitting suspended from 12.27 to 2.00 pm.

Ministerial arrangements

MR BARR (Kurrajong—Chief Minister, Minister for Trade, Investment and the Knowledge Economy, Minister for Tourism and Events, and Minister for Major Projects) (2.00): As I think members are aware, Minister Paterson will be absent from question time today for personal reasons. The Deputy Chief Minister will assist members with questions in the health and mental health portfolios, and Minister Cheyne will assist members with questions in police, fire, emergency services and gaming reform portfolios.

Questions without notice

Canberra Health Services—performance

MR PARTON: My question is to the minister representing the Minister for Health. Minister, former Labor Chief Minister Jon Stanhope recently described the decline of our hospital system under this government from one of the best to being one of the worst performing in the country and that "that deterioration was no accident, rather it culminated through deliberate policy choices". The evidence is clear. There are 65,000 people waiting for specialist appointments, referrals being closed following changes to eligibility criteria and nurses preparing for industrial action amid stalled pay

negotiations and concerns about respect.

Minister, given repeated independent inquiries of identified governance, workforce capability and culture as ongoing issues, do you accept that these are warning signs of a broader failure in the management of our public health system?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: No, I do not. And, in fact, when I read that article, I did wonder whether Mr Stanhope and Mr Ahmed had actually bothered to look at any information about the performance of the health system.

Our emergency department performance has gone, over the last few years, from being known to be well below the national average to being one of the best in the country. It is the best on the four-hour rule—the number of people who are seen and treated within four hours at our public hospitals. And, particularly, compared to peer hospitals, both Canberra Hospital and North Canberra Hospital now perform very well. We delivered a record number of elective surgeries last year—more than 17½ thousand elective surgeries—and are on track for our 70,000 elective surgeries over the four years.

Mr Parton has talked about outpatients. I think it is really important, when you say there are 65,000 patients on the waiting list, that we also recognise that Canberra Health Services delivers around 250,000 outpatient appointments every year—250,000 outpatient appointments every year.

Historically, the ACT public system has delivered a much wider range of outpatient services than most around the country. So, the changes that are being made by Canberra Health Services are being made by clinicians on the basis of evidence and in response to the review that was undertaken by Michael Walsh at the behest of this Assembly. We see another pattern here, Mr Speaker, where the opposition demands that we undertake a review and then demands that we do not implement the recommendations.

Mr Cocks: A point of order.

MR SPEAKER: I think the minister has concluded.

Mr Cocks: The point of order was on debating.

MR SPEAKER: I accept that, but it is concluded.

MR PARTON: Minister, does your government accept responsibility for the ongoing failures which have resulted in prolonged waiting lists, record workforce dissatisfaction and decisions that now risk leaving patients without the specialist care that they were referred to receive?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I accept responsibility and this government accepts responsibility for the significant improvements in the performance of our health system over recent years, particularly since the COVID-19 pandemic. You talk to Canberrans and they will say that our territory and our health system had one of the best responses to the COVID-19 pandemic you could see around the world. And since then, we have seen significant improvements in performance, including in elective surgery, in emergency departments and now in the focus on outpatients.

Mr Speaker, what I think is ethically and morally unacceptable is to allow people to wait on an outpatient waiting list when they will not be seen. A number of the people who are on these waiting lists, whose position is being reviewed, have been on the waiting list for years because there are national shortages of these specialists. It would not matter how much funding was put in by the government; we cannot recruit and retain specialists in some of these areas, in order to provide additional outpatient appointments in some of these areas. It is not ethical to leave people on a waiting list for four years or six years without telling them that they are not likely to be seen.

Opposition members interjecting—

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: These changes have been made based on evidence by clinicians reviewing the evidence of who should be prioritised in terms of access to these clinics, and that clinical evidence is actually being used.

Ms Lee interjecting—

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: Ms Lee seems to think that we should not be basing decisions on clinical evidence and that these decisions should not be being made by clinicians.

Mr Cocks: A point of order. The minister is not only addressing a point which was not raised at all but again debating the question.

MR SPEAKER: Mr Cocks, the minister was responding to an interjection. If you do not interject, she will not respond to it.

Ms Lee: A point of order. That was a personal reflection on me, and I ask the minister to withdraw.

MR SPEAKER: I must say that I did not hear what she said—

Opposition members interjecting—

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: If I have misunderstood Ms Lee's interjections as thinking that she did not think we should be following the evidence, I apologise for that misinterpretation of her interjections.

Ms Lee interjecting—

MR SPEAKER: Thanks. Members, if you are going to interject, there is going to be a consequence to that, so I would ask that you do not interject and you will not have that consequence. A supplementary Mrs Morris?

MRS MORRIS: Minister, why are we still hearing the same concerns raised by staff about workplace respect and serious clinical governance and patient safety concerns, while patients continue to experience serious barriers to accessing care?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: That is a very broad question. Every health system faces challenges. It is very, very difficult to deliver health services that keep up with demand

in an aging population and with increasing expectations and increasing health technology.

I recognise that our healthcare workers work really, really hard and that sometimes it is a very stressful job. I will always talk up the work of our healthcare workforce. I will always celebrate that work. Dr Patterson will always celebrate that work. This government will always celebrate the incredible work of our healthcare workers: those in the emergency department who have significantly improved the performance; those in the rest of the hospitals that have improved that patient flow so that the emergency department can be quicker; those who deliver our elective surgeries and have delivered record numbers of elective surgeries last year and are on track to deliver our election commitment of 70,000 elective surgeries; and those who work so hard in our outpatient clinics. All of those staff deserve our support, and every time members of this place talk down our health system, they are talking down the work of these incredible staff.

Canberra Health Services—specialist referrals

MR PARTON: My question is to the minister representing the Minister for Health. Minister, the community is furious that Canberra Health Services commenced advising patients that existing referrals to specialist outpatient clinics have been closed because they no longer meet revised referral criteria despite those referrals having been accepted under the previous criteria. Minister, when were you or your successor informed that CHS was reviewing referral criteria in a way that could result in existing referrals being closed?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: We have been talking about for some time, including in forums like the general practice forum, that we were going to need to review the way that outpatient clinics were done. As I have indicated earlier, this work was commenced prior to Michael Walsh's review, but it is also absolutely in line with the recommendations that Mr Walsh made to Canberra Health Services that we needed to get a better handle on outpatients. It is also the feedback that we have had from GPs. They want certainty—certainty is hard. They want better information about whether or not referrals are going to be accepted and what the referral criteria are.

Mr Parton: That is not what Rebekah Hoffman said this morning.

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: Actually, I listened to what Rebekah Hoffman said, and it was in fact—if you listened to what Betty Ge said, she actually said that GPs in the ACT, noting that Rebekah Hoffman works in New South Wales and not in the ACT, were aware of this work. Yes, they want a better connection and they are getting a better connection and better communication from Canberra Health Services about this work. Clinicians themselves do not want to know that there are people sitting on the waitlist list for years when those clinicians know that people are unlikely to ever be seen and also know that for many of those people who are on the waiting list actually they do not need a specialist appointment or they have already sought help somewhere else. Betty Ge gave the example on radio this morning of students who have actually moved interstate or people who have actually moved interstate, because we have a transient population. She gets, as a GP, that phone call from CHS or gets the letter and says, "Well, yes, of course that person is not going to get that service. They don't even live here anymore."

MR PARTON: Minister, just to be clear, did you receive advice that these changes could affect tens of thousands of patients who had already been waiting for specialist care? And are you willing to table this advice?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I will obviously take that question on notice on behalf of the minister, but, again, I think Mr Parton claiming that this is going to affect tens of thousands of people is him making up his own facts here. As we have indicated, there are 65,000 people on the waiting list, but there are always going to be people on the waiting list. Canberra Health Services delivers around a quarter of a million outpatient services every year. There are always going to be new referrals, and there are always going to be people on the waiting list, and the waiting list is always going to be triaged by clinicians.

MRS MORRIS: Minister, was it you or your successor who approved this approach?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I thank the Deputy Leader of the Opposition. As I indicated earlier, this has been a discussion for quite some time as to how we were going to better manage outpatients and be honest with our community about what was achievable and be honest with people who have been on the waiting list for years that were unlikely to be able to be seen. I think it is unethical to leave people on a waiting list for years, knowing that they could wait for many more years and may never be seen, and not let them know that. I think that that is unethical.

Mr Cocks: Point of order, Mr Speaker: under 118AA, the question was in fact about who approved the measure, not how long we have been having a discussion around it. It is different from the earlier question, and I do not believe that the minister has answered that question.

MR SPEAKER: Minister, do you have anything further to add?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I am happy to take that question on notice.

Operation Kingfisher—potential criminal charges

MS BARRY: My question is to the Attorney-General. Attorney-General, the Integrity Commissioner's Operation Kingfisher report found that some of the conduct of the individuals named could constitute criminal charges. Are you aware of any criminal charges being considered by police following the findings in the Operation Kingfisher report?

MS CHEYNE: No, I am not aware.

MS BARRY: Attorney-General, have the DPP communicated with the government, or have you sought advice from the DPP, as to whether there will be prosecution of the individuals that were found to have engaged in serious corrupt conduct, and if so, when?

MS CHEYNE: I will take that on notice. I would note that there has been a discussion in this place before about, where there has been a finding of corrupt conduct, what is the appropriate method to which that is then referred for possible investigation and

charge, if that is appropriate. I do not have an update on how that issue has been resolved and so in the interests of being as accurate as possible to the Assembly, I will take it on notice.

MRS MORRIS: Is it in the public interest to prosecute people who have been found to be seriously corrupt in public office, given that this legislature has established indictable offences for such conduct?

Mr Barr: Point of order, Mr Speaker, that would be seeking an expression of opinion.

MR SPEAKER: Yes, I am happy with the minister taking it because it is asking if something is in the public interest, which I think is a reasonably established principle. It is in the public interest or not. Are you willing to take it, minister or?

Mr Barr: Asking for a legal opinion then?

MR SPEAKER: If it is in the public interest, not if it is in the legal interest.

MS CHEYNE: I am not sure that it is for me to say on any individual matter what is or is not in the public interest without having all of the facts and material available. All I have is the Integrity Commission's report.

Government procurement—Strathnairn school

MS CLAY: My question is to the Minister for Education.

Minister, Labor first announced a new school for Strathnairn ahead of the 2020 election, promising it would open in 2025. Phase 1 did not open until this year. Phase 2 is not yet complete. And the original announcement was for a $45 million project; the original budget was $62 million; so far, the project has cost over $100 million.

Last week's release of the Education Directorate's desktop review showed the phase 1 delegate was the former executive group business manager in the Education Directorate who was the subject of adverse commentary in Operation Kingfisher; and the phase 2 delegate was the then-director-general who has since been found to have engaged in serious corrupt conduct. How extensively has the government tested whether the involvement of either delegate on the Strathnairn School project lead to a worse outcome in terms of cost, delays or delivery?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I am disappointed, I guess, with Ms Clay's question, particularly in relation to the fact that the document she is referring to specifically identified that the recommendations of the tender evaluation panel had been followed in every other procurement, and that there is no indication that any of the issues that lead to the outcome in Operation Kingfisher had been identified. There were no red flags in relation to any of the other procurements, including Strathnairn School.

Ms Clay: A point of order on relevance. The question was "How extensively did the government test the involvement of those two officials in that project?"

MR SPEAKER: I think the minister had concluded her answer, but do you have

anything further to add, Minister?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: By dint of the fact that those two officials held the positions that they did, Mr Speaker, they would have been delegates on a number of projects, and decision makers on a number of projects, and that is exactly what the document that was tabled shows; that they were in fact delegates on a number of projects. And there is no reason; there has not been any report that the government has received; I am not aware of any report that has been made to any integrity official in relation to any other procurement; and so there is no evidence that this particular procurement of Strathnairn School was affected by any of the issues that came to light through Operation Kingfisher, and indeed the Auditor-General's report before that.

MS CLAY: Minister, why did the cost of the Strathnairn school project increase from $45 million at announcement to over $100 million on delivery?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I will take that question on notice, recognising that there have been really substantial increases in construction costs over recent years.

MR BRADDOCK: Minister, what detailed project checks were undertaken on that particular project, to ensure the government had the confidence there was no influence from the involvement of those two delegates?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I will take that question on notice.

Business—interstate relocations

MS CASTLEY: My question is to the Minister for Business and Industry. ABS data shows that the ACT currently has the highest rate in the country for businesses moving interstate. The data also shows that, over the last four years, two per cent of local firms have crossed the border on net. Minister, why is this happening?

MR PETTERSSON: I thank Ms Castley for her question and her strong advocacy on behalf of Canberra businesses. There are a range of factors that could lead any one particular business to choose to relocate. I am not going to speculate on any one particular decision for any particular business. There are a couple of things I would advise the member may be of interest. There are a range of opportunities that can sometimes present in other jurisdictions, from government supports, in particular, for industries that are targets of the ACT government. We are competing with other jurisdictions that are providing quite lucrative incentives for businesses to conduct their businesses in those jurisdictions, which presents challenges for the ACT to match some of those incentives. There are, of course, some other issues that may be of interest to, in particular, business, but I am not going to go through a detailed list of those in question time.

MS CASTLEY: Is the minister confident that government policies are not responsible for businesses leaving the ACT? If so, what is the evidence for this view?

MR PETTERSSON: I thank Ms Castley for the question, though I cannot fully accept the premise of it. The ACT is a fantastic place to do business. We have the third-highest business growth rate in the country. That, to me, says that we are doing a good job here

in the ACT of supporting businesses to start up and grow. I acknowledge that that is not a uniform experience for every business, particularly in these inflationary times, and that there are some businesses locally that are doing it tough. However, the ACT's story on the whole is a positive one. When businesses make decisions in their best interests, that is not always in alignment with what is best for the ACT—I recognise that. We are hopeful that we can continue to see business numbers grow here in the ACT, and we will do our very best to ensure that every business and more businesses want to stay here in the ACT.

MR EMERSON: Minister, what new measures has the ACT government introduced to support the viability of small business in the ACT in this term of government?

MR PETTERSSON: I thank Mr Emerson for the question. We are still completing the actions from the last business strategy. There are only a couple of outstanding items to that—and that was the centre of Ms Castley's question the other day. I am looking forward to releasing the next Small Business Strategy for the ACT. We want to do everything we can as a government to support business to thrive in this city. There are a range of business supports that exist and a range of initiatives and grants that are available to businesses to take up. We want to work with business to make sure that the local economy is thriving. I look forward to providing more information to the chamber with the release of that strategy.

Public schools—funding

MS LEE: My question is to the Minister for Education. Minister, in a recent opinion piece in the *Canberra Times* titled "Front up and explain to public school families why you're making these cuts", the head of the ACT branch of the AEU, Angela Burroughs, wrote:

> Public school principals are being left to deliver that news themselves, absorbing decisions made somewhere else. That is no way to run an education system or to develop "one public education system" as suggested by the review.

Ms Burroughs went on to say:

> A government cannot outsource its decision-making and then outsource the blame for it too.
>
> The scale of what's happening deserves far more scrutiny than it's getting.

Just last week in question time, you accused me of spreading misinformation and you accused me of scaremongering and of causing the distress caused by your debacle when it comes to school budgets. Minister, why are you continuing—

Mr Pettersson: Point of order. I would ask that you direct Ms Lee to direct her comments through the chair.

MS LEE: Through you, Mr Speaker: Minister, you accused me—

Mr Pettersson: A point of order, Mr Speaker—

MS LEE: What you said: address it through the chair. Through you, Mr Speaker—

Mr Pettersson: You can't be serious, Ms Lee.

MR SPEAKER: Standing order 42 requires all comments to be directed to the chair. You need to make sure you are doing that.

MS LEE: Are you going call a point of order every single time someone says that?

MR SPEAKER: Members, this is question time, not debate time. Could you ask your question and direct it through me, please, Ms Lee?

Mr Pettersson: You're not talking through the chair.

MR SPEAKER: Mr Pettersson, you have had your point of order.

MS LEE: Through you, Mr Speaker, the minister accused me of spreading misinformation and the minister accused me of fearmongering and creating distress that she is responsible for. Minister, why are you continuing to outsource the blame for this budget debacle caused by you?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I thank Ms Lee for the question. I do not resile from my comment. Last week, she was spreading misinformation and causing distress. But I also have recognised, and I have done it a number of—

Ms Lee: Point of order. Mr Speaker, I seek your guidance. The minister has now continuously accused me of spreading misinformation, and I ask you to make a call about whether that is actually accusing me of misleading the Assembly.

MR SPEAKER: I do not think that she has said words to that effect. But, that said, if she is doing that, that is a matter for the Assembly to determine, if you want to move a substantive motion. My understanding is that what she said is that you have misled the community, which is somewhat different. But you would need to move a substantive motion.

Ms Lee: On that point of order, Mr Speaker: you have also—correct me if I'm wrong—given advice that using the word "misinformation" and the term "spreading misinformation" is unparliamentary, and I ask her to withdraw.

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: Mr Speaker, I do not believe I actually did use that word, but I will withdraw. If I did, I withdraw.

MR SPEAKER: Let's focus on the question and answer the question, please, Minister.

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I have to remember what the question actually was. To the point, I actually had a conversation with the Education Directorate about this yesterday. I have both taken responsibility and thanked the principals and school leaders for their collaborative work with the Education Directorate. The Education Directorate and I have heard that feedback from principals, and the Education Directorate is now working with principals to ensure that the messaging is very much shared. The directorate is

taking responsibility for the messaging and not leaving that work to principals.

MS LEE: Minister, how on earth are you taking responsibility, given that you continue to claim that there are no cuts, despite the Education Union, principals, teachers, parents and students all expressing the same concerns?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: At the risk of boring the other members of the Assembly, I will repeat what I said multiple times last week. There has not been a cut to education funding. There was a 7.3 per cent increase in public education funding from the 2025-26 budget to the 2026-27 budget. At the same time, changing the way that we are doing budgeting to make it more equitable, to make it fairer in line with the school system resourcing review, has meant that some schools will see a reduction in their funding between 2026 and 2027. I have been saying that the whole way along. I have been available, I have talked to the media, I have been on radio, and I have answered questions in this place numerous times—the same question over and over and over again—taking responsibility for the fact that we are implementing the recommendations of the public school system resourcing review, which this place called for and, I thought, supported, but apparently some in this place do not.

MR COCKS: Minister, isn't the reason that principals, teachers and parents are angry about these cuts that they have to live with the consequences of your decisions?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I again say that school budgets for 2027 have not been finalised. There is a process underway. Principals received their student resource allocation preliminary budgets for feedback, and there has been a further process in the first week of this term for principals to deliver a school budgeting tool to the Education Directorate, to work through with the directorate. The assessment of that feedback has been underway. There is a small team of people in the directorate working extremely hard and engaging very closely with principals about this to ensure that we can deliver on the recommendation of the public school resourcing review to be more equitable and fair in the way that our resourcing is distributed among our schools, but also to ensure that every school can manage the impact if there is a reduction in funding between 2026 and 2027, which we were clear would be the case for some schools.

But I think it is important to understand that school resourcing goes up and down year by year and most principles are used to managing their budget year by year. I recognise that this particular process is the first time we have done budgets this way and it has caused distress for a significant number of principals, school leaders and school communities. The distress of the school communities has been exacerbated by the opposition's scaremongering.

Public schools—staff and student safety

MS LEE: My questions to the Minister for Education. Minister, successive Education Directorate annual reports show rising incidents of occupational violence in ACT schools. Reported bullying incidents have increased significantly between 2021 and 2025, and teachers told the ACT Public School System Resourcing Review that they increasingly feel like "bodyguards" or "punching bags". The Centre for Independent Studies has also found that teachers lose an average of nine minutes of every 30-minute lesson managing student misbehaviour. It was revealed that even your own department

has developed an internal, multi-hazard risk assessment document and created a crisis management team to deal with the fallout from the school budgets debacle.

Minister, given the rising rates of violence, bullying and classroom disruption, isn't it clear that your current approach to these issues is failing our students and teachers?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: Well, the current budgets have not been implemented. In fact, the budgets for 2027 have not even been finalised, and the data that Ms Lee is referring to is old lag data—

Ms Lee: A point of order: the question was very clear and on the rising rates of violence, and I did quote their own directorate's annual report data from 2021 through to 2025.

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: What is the question Ms Lee? Repeat the question, because I was actually answering it—

MR SPEAKER: Minister, she is on her feet raising a point of order. You can respond to that if you wish to. Ms Lee?

Ms Lee: Thank you, Mr Speaker. The question was very clear, so I don't know if she needs to take her own advice, which she gave to me, and open her ears—

MR SPEAKER: Ms Lee!

Ms Lee: The question is: given the rising rates of violence and classroom disruption, isn't it clear that the current approach to these issues is failing our students and teachers?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: If Ms Lee was not trying to draw a bow between the current approach to budgeting, which she did talk about in the preamble to her question, and the issue of occupational violence, then that is fair, but she did have a very long preamble that did conflate quite a number of issues, Mr Speaker.

On the issue of occupational violence, it is one of the things that the directorate has been specifically focused on—changing that approach to ensure schools are better supported to manage the risk of occupational violence. One of the things I have been talking about to principals, to the unions and to the directorate is in relation to ensuring that risks are identified earlier and intervention is put in place earlier so that the actual incidents of violence reduce. That is the approach that Kingsford Smith School has been taking, and it has been working.

MS LEE: Minister, what programs to manage behaviour are currently being used at which schools, and does the directorate have evidence about what is working?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I am not sure which question I am supposed to answer in that supplementary, Mr Speaker. Ms Berry has previously talked a lot in this place about Positive Behaviours for Learning and the Positive Behaviours for Learning framework that is the universal framework across all of our public schools.

I have previously responded to a question on notice from Ms Lee identifying which

programs are used in specific schools. There are a number of number of schools that use programs like the Berry Street program and other programs that support restorative practices within schools. They are specifically focused on building a better school culture to reduce the incidents of violence and bullying and to build a positive behaviour framework to ensure that students are behaving in a way that is appropriate in school.

So Positive Behaviours for Learning is the framework across all of our ACT public schools, and within that a number of schools have specific programs in place. That is one of the issues that we need to look at—in terms of how we are more consistent across our school environment. We know that teachers move from school to school, so having a number of different schools using a range of different methodologies is potentially one of the challenges that we face. At the same time, innovation at the school level is really important and commitment from principals to Positive Behaviours for Learning and restorative school environments is also really important. So the balance we need to strike is consistency but also allowing schools to be themselves as well.

MR CAIN: Minister, how many qualified teachers have left classroom-based positions in ACT schools to take roles within the Education Directorate citing increasing occupational violence and workload pressures as contributing factors?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I will take that question on notice. There is no way that I could answer it here, and I will give advice to the Assembly that it is quite likely that we will not be able to provide a specific response to that question. What I would say is that the directorate has done a good job in reducing the number of teacher vacancies. In fact, part of the work on the "one public education system" is ensuring that schools can be supported to address teacher vacancies in a more structured way. We are very conscious of the fact that we need to attract and retain excellent teachers in the ACT. There are a range of programs in place to do that. But for the detail of the question, I will come back on notice.

Government procurement—Whitlam school

MR BRADDOCK: The Education Directorate desktop review of tier 1 and tier 2 education capital projects identified that the then director-general for education was the decision-maker for the Whitlam School project and twice made qualifications on her approvals for the project, including requesting a revised evaluation report. Minister, how extensively were the former director-general's conditions on her approvals examined in the desktop review? And what gives you confidence that the Whitlam School project has not suffered similar issues as in Operation Kingfisher?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: My understanding is that in all of the projects that were considered through the desktop review, as I said earlier, the recommendation of the tender evaluation panel was taken in terms of who would be delivering that project. It is not unusual that there are some additional requirements that are put in place. I will take the detail of the question on notice in relation to how much additional examination was given to the Whitlam School project in particular, as the directorate undertook this desktop review. But, again, I think on the basis of the work that they did I am clearly advised that there were no red flags associated with that.

MR BRADDOCK: Minister, why was the former director-general of education chosen

to be the decision-maker and continued to hold that responsibility in 2024 despite the public airing of the issues from the Operation Kingfisher public hearings?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I will take that question on notice.

MS CLAY: Minister, what further investigations do you intend to make through your directorate or otherwise regarding the integrity of the procurement for the Whitlam School?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I have no indication. As far as I am aware, no-one has written to me indicating that there are integrity issues with the procurement of the Whitlam School project. I am not sure if the Greens have further information. If they do, I would encourage them to provide that information to me and my office. I will certainly have another conversation with the director-general in relation to the work that was done through this review. More broadly, in relation to Operation Kingfisher, the work is continuing in relation to understanding the background to procurement.

I would say it is really important to understand that between 2021 and 2024 significant work was undertaken in relation to infrastructure procurement and procurement more broadly—a significant program of procurement reform. The establishment of Infrastructure Canberra has meant that we now have a specialised agency, a specialised directorate, to undertake major projects. I will take the detail of the question on notice.

I would also note in relation to the earlier question that ministers do not get involved in procurement processes. Expecting us to know the detail of why particular decisions were made during a procurement process is quite challenging, noting that, of course, I was not the minister at the time either, but the minister at the time would not have necessarily been advised, because ministers are not involved in procurement processes.

Housing—Canberra house pattern book

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: My question is to the Minister for Planning and Sustainable Development. Minister, yesterday you announced an expression of interest process has commenced for a national design competition to develop the Canberra House Pattern Book for missing middle designs. How will you ensure that homes in the Canberra House Pattern Book are suitable for Canberra?

MR STEEL: I thank Mr Werner-Gibbings for his question. I note that the missing middle housing reforms and the pattern book are a significant opportunity for his electorate of Brindabella.

The concept of a pattern book of pre-designed homes is not a new one for Canberra. Canberra was built on pattern books. In the post-war years when thousands of people were moving to Canberra for jobs, opportunities and for a new way of life, pre-designed homes were turned to. It was a practical way to build more homes at scale and make sure that we could house the booming population. Many of these homes, including those that we know today as guvvies or ex-guvvies, remain today as an iconic part of our older suburbs. Then, of course, they were followed by a range of other pattern book designs and project homes.

The Canberra house pattern book is taking this classic Canberra idea and reimagining it for our city today. We are inviting Canberra's best architects and design teams, as well as those across Australia, to contribute their ideas and innovation to a new generation of housing pattern designs tailored specifically to Canberra's unique climate, character and lifestyle. Through the expression of interest process, we are calling on these design professionals to demonstrate their credentials, their capability and experience to deliver high quality, medium density housing pattern designs including dual occupancies, tri-occupancies, townhouses and terraces.

Shortlisted entrants from the EOI process will then be selected to further develop their concepts into housing patterns through the design competition. The ACT Government Architect, Catherine Townsend, will be leading the jury in considering the suitability of the proposals and progressed designs and their ability to demonstrate, among other things, that they are unmistakably of Canberra, responding to Country, climate, landscape systems and Canberra's distinctive settings. These homes will be a good neighbour which contribute positively to our streets, neighbourhoods and community life. I would encourage members to visit the planning website to see further details.

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: Minister, who is eligible to enter the design competition?

MR STEEL: Entry in the design competition is open to architects and building designers across Australia to participate as individuals or a team. We are also inviting architecture students to participate in a design exercise as part of the competition. For professional designers, the design competition presents an opportunity to see their concepts evolve into housing patterns that could be incorporated into the pattern book, and one that may be built right across Canberra.

For students, it gives them a great opportunity to test their ideas and innovation for dual occupancies and tri-occupancy homes against a real world brief and gain recognition for their work as part of the process. As part of the student category, the two student winners will also receive about a $5,000 prize which recognises innovative ideas for Canberra's future housing.

Details of eligibility are available in the expression of interest terms and conditions on the Canberra house pattern book page of the ACT Planning website. I would encourage all interested architects in the ACT, building designers or architecture students to check this out and I look forward to seeing their ideas, creativity and visions for Canberra's future homes that come forward in their submissions.

MS BERRY: Minister, when can Canberrans expect designs in the Canberra House Pattern Book to be available to build?

MR STEEL: I thank Ms Berry for her question and note her longstanding interest in work in the housing space.

Expression of interest registrations are open now and will close on Wednesday, 3 December, and following consideration by our competition jury, shortlisted professional and student entrants should be announced soon after. We then expect stage 2, being the design competition itself, to be undertaken and winning designs selected by mid next year. The winning professional designs will then undertake design

development which will advance and refine their concepts into fully developed design exemplars, which can then be featured in the Canberra house pattern book.

The Canberra house pattern book will provide Canberrans with a library of exemplary pre-qualified, sustainable and affordable medium density home designs from 2028. These designs will be paired with a streamlined approvals pathway so that proven high quality designs can be built through a more efficient and simpler planning approvals process.

We have seen the benefit of this approach in New South Wales, where they have a pattern book in place and whole businesses are setting up just to deliver the pattern book designs. They can do so efficiently with the same materials being used again and again across different blocks, which, of course, our government has enabled for the first time through the missing middle housing reforms. The pattern book builds on those reforms, which are a landmark planning change that our government has made to support more housing in this city.

Access Canberra—customer credits

MR CAIN: My question is to the Minister for City and Government Services. Minister, at 30 June 2026, Access Canberra held credits across over 84,000 individual accounts, but customers cannot check their balances online and those credits are not automatically applied to their next registration payment. Minister, why can customers not see their available credit online, and authorise its use as part of the online registration renewal process?

MS CHEYNE: I am going to take that on notice because Mr Cain has asked a series of questions about this, both in this place and on notice, and am pretty sure I have answered this. But I am going to have to double check, due to the volume.

MR CAIN: Minister, do registration renewal notices tell customers how much credit is held in their account?

MS CHEYNE: I will take it on notice, Mr Speaker.

MS BARRY: Minister, what prevents Access Canberra from applying a customer's credit during renewal, when they already know the credit exists?

MS CHEYNE: I also think I have answered this question, but if I have not, I will come back to the Assembly. I will clarify the whole set of answers, Mr Speaker. Mr Cain may wish to wait for all of the questions that he has asked to be responded to before following up, which has become a pattern.

Taxation and levies—commercial land rates

MR MILLIGAN: My question is to the Treasurer. Treasurer, commercial rates are increasing by an average of eight per cent, despite commercial land valuations falling by 0.3 per cent. What modelling did your government undertake on how much of these additional rates will be passed on to commercial tenants through their leases?

MR STEEL: I thank the member for his question. As he knows, when the government sets rates, that is not based on the valuation of blocks across the territory. The government sets the amount of rates take in the budget every year. We certainly recognise the pressure that is faced by both businesses and households at the moment when setting rates. But, while the valuation methodology of course affects an individual rates assessment for a particular block, the government's increase to rates is not based on valuation.

MR MILLIGAN: What modelling did the government undertake to consider the impact to business confidence, commercial property values and the cost of doing business in Canberra?

MR STEEL: No specific detailed modelling, but we certainly consider those issues when setting rates annually as part of the budget process, recognising the particular pressures that are faced by businesses at the moment in the inflationary environment that we have in the economy, largely driven by the war in the Middle East. That is, of course, also affecting government costs and the cost of delivering government services as well. That was also taken into account in the rates decisions that we made in the budget process.

MR COCKS: Treasurer, will you release any analysis that you relied on to justify these rates increases?

MR STEEL: The government has released the budget in some level of detail, and that is available for everyone in the chamber to view. We have gone through an estimates process. Those sorts of questions could have been asked during the process. I do not think they were. We have now passed the budget and we are looking forward to the next budget. In every budget we will consider the circumstances that we face at that time, the conditions for business and the broader economy as well as the conditions for government, in making sure that we can continue to fund the services that Canberrans rely on.

Mr Cocks: I raise a point of order under 118AA. Mr Speaker, the question was about analysis that was relied on to justify the rates increases. It was not a question about the budget, nor about questions asked during budget estimates. The Treasurer has not been responsive to the question, and I would ask that you direct him to come back under standing order 118AA.

Mr Steel: On the point of order, I clearly, in the previous answer, said that there was not a detailed set of modelling that was undertaken. This was a supplementary question, and so it follows from the earlier—

MR SPEAKER: I think the minister was responsive. He has provided the answer to what the government relied on, which was the budget process, which has been tabled in this place. So I think that he has been responsive.

Strathnairn School—funding

MISS NUTTALL: My question is to the Minister for Education. In question on notice No 1540, Ms Clay asked the Minister for Education how many homes the Strathnairn

School currently serves and how many it is expected to serve in 10 years. The minister could not provide an answer, indicating that the Education Directorate designs allocations based on current and anticipated future populations but does not hold data on dwelling counts or projections. Who did your directorate consult with to determine how many school places it needs to offer both now and in a decade's time at Strathnairn School?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: It does not seem like rocket science to me that school building would be based on population projections rather than the number of buildings in which the population lives. Populations can live in different configurations. The real question is how many children and young people are expected to be in a particular population or a particular catchment to design the school. I will take the question on notice, in relation to whom the directorate consulted with, but the basis of the original question was incorrect in that schools are not designed to serve a particular number of dwellings; they are designed to serve a particular population.

MISS NUTTALL: Noting this area of West Belconnen is one of our fastest-growing regions, how many families have been turned away for enrolment so far?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I will take the question on notice.

MS CLAY: Minister, what work is the directorate doing to ensure Strathnairn School and schools in West Belconnen can provide a place for every child that needs one?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: Every child and young person in our city will have a place in a public school. I will take on notice the detail of the question for Ms Clay in relation to West Belconnen. The intention of developing Strathnairn School was obviously to meet the needs of that local community. As was discussed earlier, there is a second stage of the Strathnairn School project. There are also, of course, other developments and projects underway in relation to ensuring that our schools, new and existing, are there to meet the needs of the local community.

I was really pleased yesterday to tour again the new Whitlam School, including the site for the new early childhood education and care centre, with the federal minister. That school is coming along really well to serve the people of the Molonglo Valley and particularly Whitlam.

Out of home care—Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children

MR EMERSON: My question is to the Minister for Children, Youth and Families. The aim of the Our Booris, Our Way partnership agreement is "to bring about tangible change for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families by implementing the Our Booris, Our Way recommendations which improve cultural, physical and socio-emotional health and wellbeing outcomes for families within the child protection system".

I understand that the Our Booris, Our Way Implementation Oversight Committee, which signed this partnership agreement with the ACT government in March 2025, has been informed there is no funding for them beyond December 2026.

Minister, how does this decision align with the ACT government's commitments to reduce the over-representation of First Nations children in the child protection system and to shared decision-making under the National Agreement on Closing the Gap?

MR PETTERSSON: I would like to thank Mr Emerson for the question. There is funding available until the end of the financial year, not the calendar year. Any future funding would be the decision of government.

MR EMERSON: Minister, why doesn't the Our Booris, Our Way Implementation Oversight Committee currently have secretariat support and since when has this been the case?

MR PETTERSSON: I would like to thank Mr Emerson for the supplementary question. It is an interesting question. There have been a range of secretariat supports provided to the committee in recent times. There are a range of factors behind the changes of secretariat support, and I am happy to write with further information to Mr Emerson outside of this place as to the nature of those challenges.

There is not currently secretariat support. That is something that is being addressed. Is there a part of the question I have missed, Mr Emerson?

Mr Emerson: And since when has that been the case?

MR PETTERSSON: I will take on notice what the date of those changes in secretariat support have been.

MS VASSAROTTI: How will the Our Booris, Our Way implementation plan continue to be progressed, given there seems to be a walking away from some of the governance mechanisms and support processes?

MR PETTERSSON: I would like to thank Ms Vassarotti for the question. The government is committed to reducing the over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in the out of home care system and the Our Booris, Our Way recommendations and the committee are foundational in that work and guide us to this day in how we go about doing that work.

The recommendations are progressing well. They are not fully implemented yet, but the committee's work has progressed well since 2019, and we are in a position where we are closer to the recommendations being completed than the beginning—that I am very confident of. There is ongoing work between the committee and government as to the status of each particular recommendation, but I am very confident that we are in a very good position to make good on the commitment this government made to the local Indigenous community to reduce the over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.

Access Canberra—Woden shopfront

MS CARRICK: My question is to the Minister for City and Government Services about the Woden Library Access Canberra collocation project. Infrastructure Canberra's note to your office on 1 September 2026 for input into your budget speech

said:

> We expect consultation to commence alongside the procurement process. This will provide an opportunity for community feedback to be considered early, allowing the successful contractor to incorporate relevant feedback as the design progresses.

Last week you said, "Our intention is to consult with the community. We can do both. It is not one or the other." Minister, why isn't community consultation on this project occurring now?

MS CHEYNE: I think the distinction here is that there is a difference between the design and construction tender going out compared to the detailed design. We have been clear that community engagement will inform the detailed design, particularly accessibility, the arrangement of library spaces and the customer experience. The objective—I have been clear—is to preserve the library's functions while providing a separate purpose-designed Access Canberra service centre.

MS CARRICK: Minister, what are the security risks to the Woden Library that are being mitigated by withholding from public scrutiny the tender documents for the Access Canberra relocation?

MS CHEYNE: I think to disclose those would probably be revealing the security risks themselves, which I do not want to make public. With respect to Ms Carrick's question, I am happy to discuss it with her directly or privately, but I do not think this is something that is in the public interest to be airing if the directorate has made the decision that it has.

MR EMERSON: Minister, where will people who currently use the workspaces on the first floor of the Woden Library go when the Access Canberra shopfront is moved in?

MS CHEYNE: The plan is to reconfigure library spaces that are on level 1 primarily into the ground floor area. Community rooms are not expected to be affected. The detailed design does need to address how people use the library, including quiet spaces, acoustics, accessibility and movement through the building. As I said, the objective is to preserve the library's functions.

Canberra Health Services—ophthalmology

MS VASSAROTTI: My question is to the minister representing the Minister for Health.

As we have been talking about a lot in recent days, we know that the waitlists for specialists in the ACT are exceedingly long, especially for specialties such as cardiology, paediatrics and ophthalmology. The Canberra Health Services ophthalmology clinic no longer even accepts referrals for 11 eye conditions and it seems that emergency services are a problem. One patient has reported to us that when they presented at CHS in need of emergency macula reattachment surgery, they were told to get someone to drive them to Sydney as that emergency surgery could not be provided here. That travel time has had a permanent impact on this person's eyesight. Is there an emergency ophthalmologist available in CHS at all times?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: My understanding is that the answer to that question is no, there is not. I have actually had a personal experience of having to present for an issue that required an ophthalmologist and there was a reasonable chance that there would not be someone available at short notice on call. So I will take the detail of the question on notice, but my understanding is the answer is there is not always an on-call ophthalmologist available.

MS VASSAROTTI: Under CHS policy, are there circumstances in which a patient requiring emergency surgery would be told to get someone to drive them to Sydney?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: Yes, I have also heard from that constituent as well. My understanding is there would be circumstances where the quickest access to treatment would be to drive to the Eye Hospital in Sydney.

MR BRADDOCK: Minister, what measures is the government currently taking to bring more ophthalmologists to Canberra to rectify the situation?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I will take the question on notice, Mr Speaker, but work has been underway and so I am sure the minister will come back with detail on that.

Free period products rollout

MS BERRY: My question is for the Minister for Education. Minister, could you please update the Assembly on the progress of the free period product rollout?

MS TOUGH: I can take this one; it is broader than education. But I would like to thank the member for her question and the work she has done on the free period product rollout, to date.

I am very pleased to update the chamber about the important program to end period poverty in the ACT. And I am proud that we are leading the way nationally to support women and girls. I would also like to thank my colleague, Minister Orr, for introducing the legislation around period products and her leadership and advocacy in this area.

Following the commencement of the Period Products and Facilities (Access) Act 2023, the ACT government has been progressively expanding access to these products and ensuring these can be accessed with privacy and dignity. The ACT government has provided free period products to student in need, for many years, but they were commonly available through schools' front offices. Following a trial in 2025, period product dispensers have been installed in all ACT public schools, with the type and location of dispensers tailored to each school setting.

Dispensers will be installed in student-friendly locations including in girls', gender-neutral and accessible bathrooms. In primary schools, the dispensers contain pads; in high schools, preschool-to-year-10 schools and colleges, they contain pads and tampons. Students can still access free period products in other parts of schools such as wellbeing spaces, classrooms and front offices.

The rollout of dispensers to make period products available for free forms part of the

ACT government's efforts to support the health and wellbeing of women, girls and all people who menstruate, in the ACT.

MS BERRY: Minister, why were ACT public schools chosen as the first locations for the rollout?

MS TOUGH: I thank the member for the question and for her previous work in this area. I firstly want to pay tribute to the students at Canberra High School who delivered a pitch to improve access to period products, in March 2021 as part of International Women's Day. From this pitch, the ACT government commenced the period products project pilot in term three of 2025, which provided free period products to student across 31 ACT public schools. The schools selected included a mix of primary, P-to-10, high school and college settings across the ACT region.

Prior to that trial, period poverty represented a critical barrier to education and wellbeing, with up to 26% of students having missed school due to lack of access to period products; and more than 60% having worn products for extended time periods. By the conclusion of the trial, survey feedback from over 1100 students confirmed strong support for the program, with most respondents reporting easier access to products and greater comfort discussing their menstrual health—which, personally, I think is something wonderful. Furthermore, the evaluation found perceived improvements in student wellbeing, reduced absenteeism and enhanced dignity in school environments.

Having shown a real difference to reduce stigma, improve understanding of menstrual health, and ease some cost-of-living pressures for families, the pilot is now being rolled out across all ACT public schools. It ensures no student across the region will miss out on learning due to period poverty and a lack of access to period products.

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: Minister, what are the next steps to improve access to free period products and end period poverty?

MS TOUGH: I thank the member for his question. I am pleased to speak to the next phase of this important program, which is centred on strengthening partnerships to build on progress already made, and move to a future where period poverty becomes a thing of the past.

Our government understands that access to essential period products is a fundamental human right, not a luxury. This government understands that menstruation is a normal part of life and access to period products is a matter of equity, dignity and participation. We also recognise the importance of listening to the experiences of people who menstruate, and ensuring their voices inform future initiatives.

Our commitment is clear: reduce barriers to participation in education, employment and community life, and ensure that no person is disadvantaged because they cannot afford essential period products. As it currently stands, period product dispensers are now available in the Child and Family Centres, the Child Development Service, the Housing ACT service centre, all ACT libraries, the ACT courts, the ACT Civil and Administrative Tribunal, and even here in the Legislative Assembly.

Ending period poverty will require sustained effort and collaboration across governments, schools, community organisations and our broader community. Our government remains committed to doing that work. Together, we can continue building a Canberra where everyone can manage their period with dignity, where support is available where needed, and when period poverty becomes a thing of the past.

Government procurement—conduct in procurement

MRS MORRIS: My question is to the Chief Minister. Chief Minister, I refer to your response last week regarding CFMEU influence on ACT government procurement, the findings of Operation Kingfisher concerning the CFMEU's lobbying and its involvement in the implementation of the Secure Local Jobs Code and the broader question of how your government considers representations from the union when making policy and procurement decisions. Chief Minister, is it still your position that the government has never been influenced by the CFMEU, despite the findings associated with Operation Kingfisher?

MR BARR: Yes, the question of me was broader than Kingfisher, and those individuals do not represent the government in its totality. The point that I have made is that stakeholders of all kinds will seek to influence this place. In reference to government, for 12 years certainly—from the period 2012 to 2024—the definition of "government" includes multi parties—it includes the Greens as well. Any decision in relation to legislation in this place, with the exception of one full-year term, this century has required other parties to agree—not just the government or the Labor Party.

It is highly likely that there have been circumstances where the Liberal Party and the CFMEU have reached the same conclusion on a particular issue.

Mr Parton interjecting—

MR BARR: Reaching the same policy conclusion on a particular issue before the parliament does not indicate influence. By the same logic, if the government agrees with the position of the Business Chamber, the Property Council, the *Canberra Times* or Ross Solly's *Breakfast* program, does that suggest that we are influenced by their views? No. We will listen to a wide variety of stakeholders and reach our own conclusions. That sometimes those conclusions would be the same as the CFMEU would be a position where every single member in this place will have at one point in their career, I imagine, found themselves agreeing with the position the CFMEU have put or that the CFMEU would agree with the position that they have put. Yes, it is quite clear— *(Time expired.)*

MRS MORRIS: Chief Minister, will you concede that the CFMEU has in fact sought to influence government policy, regardless of whether you accept that its lobbying was successful?

MR BARR: As I answered in answer to the earlier question, every organisation, media, individuals, community groups and other members of parliament all seek to influence decisions of this place. That happens every single day on every single issue. The insinuation of the question last week was that that influence was somehow improper. It is not. They are welcome to express a view on particular issues and there will be

occasions—as I mentioned in my last answer—where people will agree with that. People will often arrive at the same position, possibly for different reasons or through different processes.

Simply because the CFMEU put forward a proposition, does not mean that it must automatically be rejected. I am aware of situations where the Liberal Party has supported a CFMEU position—for example, in response to asbestos or silica dust or a range of issues. So this exercise here in attempting to suggest that, if you ever find yourself agreeing with a position of the CFMEU, you are therefore influenced by them would work and everyone would be accountable against that metric.

MR PARTON: Chief Minister, can you identify one occasion on which your government took a decision contrary to the CFMEU's stated interests because it was the right thing to do for the ACT community?

MR BARR: Yes, numerous. I am happy to take on notice and provide a comprehensive list over this century. There are plenty of examples where the CFMEU have argued for particular positions that have not been adopted by the government or only adopted in part or where the Assembly has sought to agree with a CFMEU position and the Labor Party has not. There are examples of all of those things over the years. But the fundamental point here is that they are entitled to put a view, like every other stakeholder organisation—every community group, every individual, every media outlet. Everyone every day seeks to influence decisions of this place. To suggest that they alone are not allowed to and everyone else is is not fair, and to suggest that no-one else in this parliament is ever influenced by the position of stakeholders is also absurd.

Mr Speaker, all further questions can be placed on the notice paper.

Supplementary answer to a question without notice
Government procurement—conduct in procurement

MR PARTON: In question time on Thursday last week, I asked the Chief Minister whether he would rule out allowing the CFMEU's political influence or objections to stand in the way of reforms that are needed to ensure independent and transparent government procurement. The Chief Minister responded by saying, "Of course I will; the government has never been influenced by the CFMEU." The broad statement that the government has never been influenced by the CFMEU, particularly even in reference to the Chief Minister's answer today, I think is a mislead of the Assembly. It is abundantly clear to everyone that the CFMEU has, over a long period of time, had a degree of influence over ACT Labor. I do not accept the Chief Minister's answer, and I would ask him to withdraw and apologise to the Assembly for that mislead.

MR SPEAKER: Chief Minister, on the point of order.

MR BARR: There is no point of order, Mr Speaker. If I need to reiterate the points that I have just made, there is no single organisation, including the CFMEU, that determines ACT government policy. The government and the entire Legislative Assembly is, of course, accountable to the community and makes decisions based on what they consider to be the best interests of territory. In a democracy, every stakeholder seeks to influence public policy. Advocating for a policy position and seeking to persuade

decision-makers is neither unusual nor improper. It is, indeed, a normal part of democracy and public debate.

Legislative Assembly members engage with a wide range of organisations and individuals before they make a decision and vote in this place. Listening, however, is not the same as being directed and the fact that an organisation supports a policy does not establish that it caused the policy. By that logic, any time the government adopts a position that is also supported by a business organisation, a professional association, a community group or a media campaign, it could be argued that those organisations were determining government policy. That is clearly not how democratic government operates.

ACT government decisions are made by elected representatives, informed by advice from the public service, consultation, evidence, stakeholder engagement and consideration of the public interest. Those decisions are subject to established governance and administrative processes, legislative scrutiny, Assembly committee oversight and public accountability. The point I made in responding to the question before is that ACT Labor, as distinct from the government, operates in a parliament where it does not hold a majority in its own right. Therefore, every piece of legislation and every major reform is subject to debate and scrutiny by other parties, by independents, both inside and outside of executive government over the course of this century, including during the 12 years when the ACT Greens were part of the executive government.

Every MLA is entitled to advocate on behalf of their constituents, to engage with stakeholder groups, industry representatives, community organisations, businesses and unions. That engagement is an essential part of representative democracy. However, transparency around decision-making is important, and this does include the integrity measures that we have in place, including the publication of ministerial diaries—something I think should extend to all members of this place so that we know who is influencing who. We support extending transparency measures more broadly to the entire membership of this place. So, if the question here is around influence, and the inference there is undue influence, then surely a greater transparency on who is meeting who would help address that.

Papers

Mr Speaker presented the following papers:

> Bills, referred to Committees, pursuant to standing order 174—Correspondence—
>
> Bill—Inquiry—Gaming Machine (Harm Prevention and Reduction) Amendment Bill 2026—Letter to the Speaker from the Chair, Standing Committee on Economics, Industry and Recreation, dated 22 October 2026.

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

> Children and Young People Act—Therapeutic Support Panel for Children and Young People—2026 Report, dated 25 September 2026.
>
> Custodial Inspector Act—Review of a Critical Incident by the ACT Custodial

Inspector—A self-harm incident, involving a use of force at the Alexander Maconochie Centre 24 July 2025—Government response, dated October 2026.

Food and nutrition curriculum—Inclusive—Teaching resources improvement—Assembly resolution of 3 September 2025—Government response, dated October 2026.

Freedom of Information Act, pursuant to section 39—Copy of notice provided to the Ombudsman—Freedom of Information request—Decision not made in time—Education Directorate—FILE2025/38354, dated 11 September 2026.

Office of the National Rail Safety Regulator—Annual report 2025-2026, undated.

Rail Safety National Law—Rail Safety National Law National Regulations (Fees) Amendment Regulations 2026 (2026 No 289) made under the Rail Safety National Law, together with an explanatory statement.

Subordinate legislation (including explanatory statements unless otherwise stated)

Legislation Act, pursuant to section 64—

Canberra Institute of Technology Act and Financial Management Act—Canberra Institute of Technology (CIT Board Member) Appointment 2026 (No 3)—Disallowable Instrument DI2026-217 (LR, 15 October 2026).

Emergencies Act—Emergencies (Fees) Determination 2026 (No 2)—Disallowable Instrument DI2026-214 (LR, 8 October 2026).

Government Procurement Act—Government Procurement (Non-Public Employee Member) Appointment 2026 (No 2)—Disallowable Instrument DI2026-218 (LR, 15 October 2026).

Major Events Act—

Major Events (CommBank Matildas v Colombia Match) Notice 2026—Disallowable Instrument DI2026-215 (LR, 8 October 2026).

Major Events (Cricket Season 2026-27 Events) Notice 2026—Disallowable Instrument DI2026-216 (LR, 8 October 2026).

Disability—proposed death review scheme

MISS NUTTALL (Brindabella) (3.19): I move:

That this Assembly:

(1) notes that:

(a) the Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability found that people with disability experience disproportionate rates of premature and potentially avoidable death, and recommended states and territories establish and appropriately resource disability death review schemes;

(b) Recommendation 11.14 of the Royal Commission called for disability death review schemes to be empowered to monitor and review deaths, identify patterns and potentially avoidable risk factors, make recommendations to prevent or reduce deaths and report publicly on systemic findings;

(c) in July 2024, the Government accepted Recommendation 11.14 in principle, recognising that a disability death review scheme presents an

important opportunity to better understand factors contributing to risk of death among people with disability in the territory and enable robust evidence-based prevention measures;

(d) the *Disability Royal Commission: Progress Report 2025* found that the Government had not yet commenced work to establish a disability death review scheme;

(e) ACT Official Visitors have recommended the establishment of a disability death review scheme as a priority to address the significant gap in the Territory's safeguarding framework;

(f) changes to the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) have commenced and people began losing access to supports for social, civic and community participation and capacity building daily activities from 1 October 2026; and

(g) foundational supports intended to assist people who are no longer eligible for particular NDIS-funded services have not yet been established, increasing the importance of mechanisms that can identify, monitor and respond to emerging systemic risks and adverse outcomes experienced by people with disability; and

(2) calls on the Government to:

(a) establish an ACT disability death review scheme by September 2027;

(b) consult with people with disability, representative organisations, families, advocates and relevant experts in designing the scheme;

(c) ensure the scheme is appropriately empowered and resourced to identify preventable deaths, monitor systemic risks and make public recommendations to improve safety and wellbeing outcomes for people with disability; and

(d) report to the Assembly on progress towards establishing the scheme by the last sitting week of June 2027.

I move this motion in my name calling on the ACT government to establish a disability death review scheme in the ACT. This enacts recommendations from the Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with a Disability, which found that people with disability experience disproportionate rates of premature and potentially avoidable death.

Before I get into the speech, I want to first acknowledge that this topic is confronting and advise any people with disability and their loved ones who might be listening in or reviewing the *Hansard* that this debate will cover the distressing topic of deaths of people with disability. We have sought to avoid any sensationalising of the issue and ask that all members and people who are engaging in this topic of debate ensure that their contributions are made with sensitivity. Ultimately, we must ensure that the dignity of people with disability is at the centre of any discussions which concern them and/or the systems which affect their lives.

The establishment of this scheme is a question of justice for people with disability. Statistics from the royal commission vindicate their experience of our social systems across housing, health and daily life. They show that, compared to the general population, Australians using disability services are 4.7 times more likely to die before the age of 65 and have a "potentially avoidable death" rate 3.6 times as high. People

with disabilities have told us this. They have told us where the system lets us down. They have told us why they are so worried about group homes and re-institutionalisation and about a health system that dismisses their legitimate concerns. A disability death review scheme is part of the system that lets us review and, very importantly, prevent deaths on a systemic level. While the NDIS Quality and Safeguards Commission absolutely does have the ability to investigate individual deaths of people with disabilities who are on the NDIS, there is not an entity—not federally and not locally—who looks at the trends in these deaths and makes recommendations to change those systems.

I am hoping that this will be a relatively uncontroversial motion, because what we are seeking to pass today is something that the government has already accepted "in principle" back in July 2024—that is, that "states and territories should establish and appropriately resource disability death review schemes". This recommendation from the royal commission was made back in 2023, and the first progress report in 2025 found that the "ACT government had not yet commenced the work to establish a disability death review scheme". So, today, our objective is to spur government action beyond in-principle acceptance and to see the establishment of a disability death review scheme be prioritised and budgeted for next year.

The importance of establishing this scheme is not something I anticipate disagreement on. I will try not to speak for too long. I would, however, like to read out what the royal commission outlined a disability death review scheme should include. I quote:

> 'The review schemes should function to:
> • receive, assess and record 'reviewable deaths' of people with disability, as defined in recommendation 11.15;
> • monitor and review these deaths;
> • formulate recommendations about policies and practices to prevent or reduce reviewable deaths;
> • maintain a register of reviewable deaths;
> • formulate strategies to reduce or remove potentially avoidable risk factors for reviewable deaths;
> • And establish and support the work of an expert advisory committee.

I think it is really important to hear that list of functions verbatim, because it gives us a clear understanding of what gaps currently exist and, in turn, what review mechanisms government must introduce to fill them as a matter of priority. It also highlights how the function of this review is squarely focused on improving our current system for future prevention, because, in order to change the fact that people with disability experience disproportionate rates of premature and potentially avoidable death, we must first acknowledge that we do not currently have a territory mechanism that addresses this fact with a view to change it.

The royal commission gave us 222 recommendations to improve our systems to address the violence, the abuse, the neglect and the exploitation of people with disability. Fifty of these are solely the responsibility of states and territories—84 for the commonwealth; 85 are joint—and three are commonwealth and non-government-owned responsibilities. As of the 2025 progress report, of the 50 recommendations which are solely the responsibilities of states and territories, only 7.5 per cent have been completed.

It can be frustrating when the path to change at a territory level runs headlong into federal funding constraints or the limits of divided responsibilities. While those barriers do not always stop us, we have seen firsthand that some reforms are simply beyond the powers available to the Assembly alone. Earlier this year, for example, we called for territory action in response to NDIS cuts, despite many of the key decisions sitting with the commonwealth. That is why it is particularly significant that the royal commission made clear that establishing and properly resourcing disability death review schemes is the sole responsibility of states and territories. This is an area where we not only have the authority to act but a clear obligation to do so. That is not to say that commonwealth entities do not have a role to play in developing the strongest scheme possible. In the ACT government's response to the 2025 royal commission progress report, it said that the ACT government will consider information-sharing barriers and strategies to overcome these, with a view to determine appropriate approaches to implement a disability death review scheme in an ACT context.

The information-sharing barriers speak to recommendation 11.15 of the royal commission, which recommends the development of a national agreement on disability death reviews. It is important that our systems work together and feed into the NDIS Quality and Safeguards Commission process. However, I want to make it absolutely clear that these are two separate recommendations: one places the responsibility on states and territories to establish the review schemes individually and one calls for a national agreement. That means that one is not contingent on the other, and we must progress our own work on an ACT review scheme regardless of action—or lack thereof—from other states and the commonwealth.

The recommendation for an ACT disability death review to be established is not just something that has come from a federal level or community voices; it has also come from our own independent statutory officeholders, the oversight body of the ACT Official Visitors. Their most recent annual report from 2025-26 states the following:

> Disability OVs continued to see deaths in disability care during 2025-26, and the most significant concern remains the absence of a dedicated disability death review mechanism in the ACT. Official Visitors and the Board have not observed any meaningful progress by the ACT Government towards implementing a disability death review scheme, nearly three years after the Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability recommended that disability death review schemes be established across Australia (which the ACT Government had accepted in principle). While recent national reforms may strengthen regulatory oversight, they do not address the continued absence of an ACT-based disability death review mechanism. Similarly, some Canberra service providers have introduced measures to improve safety practices and reduce the risk of preventable deaths. Although these initiatives are welcome, they are not a substitute for a formal, independent system that can review deaths, identify systemic issues, and drive broader sector wide improvements.

I do not think it could be clearer why this must be a priority for government action and planning for next year's budget. We need an independent review system that can place where the system is letting people down and piece together how we can improve it so others can have a different future.

A core part of this motion is community consultation and community involvement. It

was the cornerstone of the royal commission, from which this recommendation came. Disabled people poured their expertise, their time, their energy, spoons, hearts and souls into that process. Good reform is grounded in meaningful consultation. We believe that, to be effective, this scheme needs to be developed in collaboration with Canberrans with disabilities. Good consultation and collaboration does not look like asking people to repeat themselves indefinitely. We have heard from the royal commission, and certainly from people with disabilities and the organisations that they run in the conversations that we have had, that they would like to see progress on this scheme. Our expectation is that consultation will be run well, in a way that is respectful of the expertise, time and energy of people with disabilities and in a way that heeds what they have already told us.

I would like to end by reading directly from the Australian government's page for the *Disability Royal Commission Progress Report 2025*, which says:

> All governments are committed to sustaining momentum to ensure an inclusive Australia for people with disability. Ongoing joint government efforts will continue to focus on building better systems and implementing reforms to create an environment where people with a disability can live free from violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation.

I think it is safe to say that there have been changes to our disability landscape this year which would make any person question whether this statement can be true. We have all seen and heard the fear in our communities that we are going backwards—concerns that NDIS cuts to social and community participation supports mean the government is backpedalling on its commitment to ensuring that people with disability can live independently and fear that stalled progress on implementing recommendations of the 2023 royal commission means that our shared commitment to making all the time, resources, consultation and hope that went into it mean substantive change is dwindling. This is an opportunity to prove the intent I know we all share in this place, which is to take people with a disability seriously and do what they have already asked us to do: to believe them when they tell us our systems are wrong and to use the tools at our disposal to fix this.

MR CAIN (Ginninderra) (3.29): I want to thank Miss Nuttall for bringing this motion before this Assembly. The motion as currently presented is something that the Canberra Liberals would be supporting, but will I say a few words about the complicated presentation of amendments as well. I just have some statements in summary. As Miss Nuttall has outlined and as I want to emphasise as well, we have a royal commission calling for the establishment of a disability death review scheme, which the ACT government agreed to in July 2024, so that is over two years ago—"Yes, we will get this rolling." As confirmed in the 2025 Disability Royal Commission Progress Report, the ACT government had not started any action on this. I am sorry—this is sounding like an old record being played here, with a commitment by the ACT government not being acted upon. I think that the motion is a very important one to actually remind the government of something they said they would do, which is so disappointing given the passage of time.

The official visitors, to my understanding, from late 2020 have thought this idea was very meritorious and then strongly endorsed it as a result of the royal commission inquiry, noting the ACT government's support for this over two years ago. Of course,

as has been touched on and as we have heard on many occasions in this place, the federal Labor government just over 12 months ago made slashes to the NDIS scheme, which will be having a massive impact on the disability community in our city and on those agencies that are there to support them.

As we also know and as has particularly become apparent through the responses to the ministerial statement last week on disability in the ACT and Thriving Kids, we have a supportive scheme that was started on 1 October, but we do not really know what it is apart from a phone line. We have no details of resourcing, no details on clients, no details on who is being assisted in what particular way. Again, that was aired just last week in this chamber. What we have is a rather old story of the government agreeing to implement something over two years ago and failing to even commence the action.

I want to thank Miss Nuttall and the Greens for bringing this to us. The Canberra Liberals were very supportive of the original motion as presented and then realised these things sometimes are subject to negotiation and a bit of bartering and a bit of consensus. I note that the amendments to be presented by Minister Orr are playing with the background a little bit and changing some timelines, which Miss Nuttall will be agreeing to, which we will also agree to, but then Miss Nuttall will seek amendment to that to actually bring the implementation date to January 2028, to my understanding. Further suggestions of changes from Ms Orr will not be acceptable to the Canberra Liberals. There is a bit of a passage, a bit of a complicated journey.

I am very tempted, Madam Assistant Speaker, to leave you sitting in the chair for the rest of this, but I will resume one of my other duties in this place and take that responsibility from you. Thank you for stepping in for me.

I do want to commend Miss Nuttall for bringing this to the chamber to really remind the government that people are watching whether they implement their promises or not. When that is not the case, this chamber is certainly one of the places where that can be brought out to prompt the action and the government to act on what they say they will do.

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) (3.34): I seek leave to move my first set of amendments.

Leave granted.

MS ORR: I move:

1. After paragraph (1)(b) insert new paragraph:

"(ba) recommendations 11.15 and 11.16 outline how a disability death review should be implemented, including that the Australian Government and states and territories should enter into a national agreement that reflects the respective roles of state and territory death review schemes and the NDIS Quality and Safeguards Commission in relation to the deaths of people with disability, provides for information sharing between the death review schemes and the NDIS Commission,

and commit s to nationally consistent disability death data collection and reporting requirements, and the inclusion of disability death data within the proposed National Disability Data Asset;".

2. After all text in paragraph (1)(g), insert new paragraph:

"(1A) further notes that:

(a) reviews of NDIS participants who pass away are undertaken by the NDIS Quality Safeguarding Commission and there is no proposal for this to be discontinued;

(b) any Disability Death Review Scheme enacted in the ACT prior to an agreed information sharing system with the Commonwealth entities would mean any information related to an individual's participation in the NDIS would not be available for an ACT death review panel to consider;

(c) new legislative powers will be required to establish a Disability Death Review Scheme that can compel information from organisations under the ACT's jurisdiction with drafting of proposed legislation being subject to standard processes and timeframes.

(d) the ACT Government recognises the importance of co-designing an ACT Disability Death Review Scheme with people with disability, the broader disability community, advocacy organisations, service providers and workers to ensure a meaningful and effective Scheme is developed;

(e) the significant resources required to design and implement a Disability Death Review Scheme may have impacts on the delivery of other ACT priorities, as set out in the Disability Inclusion Strategy First Action Plan and forthcoming Second Action Plan; and".

3. Omit paragraph (2), substitute:

"(2) calls on the ACT Government to:

(a) seek agreement from the Commonwealth and Commonwealth entities for an agreed information sharing system to support an ACT Disability Death Review Scheme;

(b) determine a preferred model and roadmap for implementation for an ACT Disability Death Review Scheme by September 2027;

(c) in determining a preferred model and roadmap consult with people with disability, representative organisations, families, advocates and relevant experts; and

(d) ensure the preferred model is appropriately empowered and resourced to identify preventable deaths, monitor systemic risks, and make public recommendations to improve safety and wellbeing outcomes for people with disability; and

(3) report to the Assembly on progress towards establishing the ACT Disability Death Review Scheme by the last sitting week of June 2027.".

I have quite a bit to cover in this, so I will do my best to make it all coherent. I think the first thing I would like to just do is actually thank Miss Nuttall for her work and her office's work in working through this private members notice and the topic complexity that comes with this particular proposal.

I do not agree with some of Mr Cain's comments, and I think it is fair to say that through this discussion, in shaping up where we have got to with amendments, there has been a very high level of consideration of the information and facts that we have to deal with.

I wanted to really work through those in a constructive and positive way. Again I do thank Miss Nuttall and her office for their approach in how they have done it in working with my office and other members.

A disability death review will look at the systemic trends across people with disability who have passed away. It is there to make sure that we are learning from any avoidable systemic issues, and that goes to things such as practices within our service systems. It goes to questions of determinants that might go into the factors influencing a person with disability's passing. It is not there to look at individual cases. That is done through other mechanisms. However, it is important to look at those individual cases in order to get the systemic trends.

The ultimate goal of a disability death review scheme is about learning from deaths to prevent future harm, and it enables governments and service systems to identify systemic issues, make evidence-based recommendations and drive improvements in policy, practice and service delivery. Establishing a disability death review scheme is a significant reform, and it must be implemented carefully to ensure the resulting scheme is sustainable and effective and also has the authority and capability required to fulfil its purpose. There is a lot of work that would go into this. While Mr Cain has noted that nothing has been done, that is not actually correct. There has been early consideration given into how we would approach this.

With the amount of reforms going on across the NDIS and the feedback that we have consistently got that the sector is overwhelmed, with all their needs for consultation, this one has not been progressed perhaps at the rate it would have been progressed had that not been occurring. I think that the bigger issue here has been the information-sharing complexities that go with setting up the scheme. I am paraphrasing Miss Nuttall here, so I hope I do get it correct, and I apologise in advance if I have not.

Miss Nuttall did make comments to the recommendations in the disability royal commission report, so 11.14 as well as 11.15 and 11.16, which go to establishing disability death reviews. The commentary was around whether these could be read separately or had to be read together. I think Miss Nuttall presented the view that you could progress with the territory-based one without needing to do it simultaneously with other states and territories. I do want to push back on that, and I read now from the actual final report, which says:

> In our view, each state and territory should have a disability death review scheme and these schemes should be nationally consistent. There should be a national agreement between the Australian Government and state and territory governments which:
>
> - defines the respective roles of state and territory death review schemes and the NDIS Commission in relation to the deaths of people with disability
> - establishes a clear connection between the functions of the death review schemes and the relevant functions of the NDIS Commission, and supports the development of appropriate operational processes to facilitate this connection
> - mandates mutual information sharing between the death review schemes and the NDIS Commission
> - commits to nationally consistent disability mortality data collection and reporting requirements.

> We acknowledge the risk that any new disability death review schemes may be compromised by being overwhelmed with an unmanageable volume of death notifications. However, research indicates the deaths of people using disability services are highest among those receiving residential accommodation support …

It goes on to say, given that, in the first instance the scheme should focus on reporting for deaths of a person with a disability receiving residential accommodation support or other accommodation support. I will leave that there. It is pages 162 and 163 of the report, if anyone wants to go have a look. I raise this just to point out this is a complex part, where the best way of achieving the ultimate goal is to work across all the different service systems and harness all the information that is there.

As it stands, what is reflected in the amendments that I have circulated is that without an agreement, particularly from the commonwealth, the ACT, in standing up a disability death review scheme, will not have access to the information of NDIS participants. NDIS participant information is held by the NDIA and the NDIS Quality Safeguards Commission.

The disability royal commission report and its focus on individuals who are living in residential accommodation or other accommodation supports are more likely than not going to be NDIS participants. If we go ahead with the motion, as Miss Nuttall originally drafted it, without having an agreement in place for data sharing or being part of an interjurisdictional scheme, I think it is a very valid concern that we would have a scheme for just—actually, this is the point: it does not do what it needs to actually do.

I think Miss Nuttall in conversations with me has put, "Is there something we could do on an ACT level?" Certainly we can look to that. Again, I think we need to really go back to the intent of what the scheme is there for, and whenever you do that you really do go back to needing to look at the NDIS and the information that is collected through that.

I think the other point I would just like to make with the amendments is to also just note that this does need to be a legislative scheme, and that is so that we do clearly establish what constitutes a death that is reviewable so we can set powers to compel relevant agencies to advise and provide details on relevant deaths, determine the scope so that we make sure that we have the information required to identify trends in relation to deaths of people with disability and ensure that we have the ongoing administration arrangements in place in a structure that will work. With that comes quite a bit of process around developing legislation, scrutiny and drafting. This will be a complex bill, and the Parliamentary Counsel's Office, the ones who do all of our drafting for us for legislation, do note in their guidelines that for a complex bill it is a minimum of six months.

Certainly one of the conversations that Miss Nuttall and I have been having over the last few days is around what the appropriate timeframes are. I would say the timeframes put forward in Miss Nuttall's original motion were probably unrealistic given the complexity of this and the actual timeframe it takes for parties other than government to provide their contribution. When we look at the drafting and then when we add consultation with the community on top of that, we are already looking at nine to 12 months worth of work. Having had other motions put forward with very tight

timeframes and then being told by members they are not happy with the outcome, I am very hesitant to sign up to more of that.

In moving the amendments today what I have sought to do is acknowledge that we do have the in-principle commitment and the government remains committed. That has not been removed. It is in principle because of these complexities that we need to work through. The amendment that I have circulated goes to looking at those complexities and how we can progress what is a very complex piece of work so that the community has the assurance that this is being progressed, that it is happening, but that it is not happening at such a rate that we end up with a scheme that is not fit for purpose or does not suit the intentions that it is there to achieve.

The amendment, in summary, changes the standing up of the scheme to look at what a preferred model would be and how we would implement that so that we can understand the full complexity and be appropriately ready for that. There are also I think further amendments to come, which I believe I can hopefully speak to when they come. I will not take up too much more time right now, but I will flag that Miss Nuttall has an amendment, as we are still looking at whether we stand something up or whether we do not make a commitment today to standing something up but we do commit to progressing the work.

I would note, given my colleagues have been censured for not delivering on the will of the Assembly—I think also some of the comments that have been made by previous speakers. I do ask the Assembly to be reasonable in what it asks of the government in what we can do. Asking us to stand up a system where we would not have access to the information required to do it and where that decision and permissibility sits with another government is something that would be manifestly unfair to commit the government to doing.

Miss Nuttall has been receptive to that, and it is reflected in the amendments that we have coming. We do have slightly different interpretations on wording, which is why we have a few different amendments. Broadly, I think there is a genuine understanding that there are limitations that the government has got to work within and that we do need to be cognisant and recognise that and just not hold up unfair timelines or expectations based on them.

The last thing I just also wanted to address were the comments made about the official visitors and their calls for a disability death review scheme. Again, I would point to the annual report that they put out, the 24-25 one, which is the one I found when I quickly googled it. They also note that the government progresses recommendations 11.14, 11.15 and 11.16 as a priority to address this significant gap in current safeguarding provisions. Again, they focus on working with the National Disability Insurance Scheme Quality and Safeguards Commission and about the need to be able to share information.

In looking to want to move forward on this—I completely appreciate the position that Miss Nuttall is coming from and the intent behind what she is doing—I still remain very concerned that in trying to do something as quickly as possible we are setting ourselves up to do something that is not fit for purpose and does not achieve what it is that we are hoping to achieve. I think I will leave my comments there but might come

back with some of the amendments.

MISS NUTTALL (Brindabella) (3.47): I seek leave to move my amendments to Ms Orr's proposed amendments.

Leave granted.

MISS NUTTALL: I move:

1. In paragraph (2)(b), omit "September", substitute "June".
2. After paragraph (2)(d), insert new paragraph:
   "(e) establish the preferred model of a disability death review, subject to the outcomes of consultation, by January 2028;".

I am thankful to the minister for her and her office's engagement on their amendments. We will be accepting the bulk of them, though adding our own amendment, as I have just circulated, to reinsert the actual call to establish a disability death review scheme, subject to the outcomes of consultation and following the government's roadmap for implementation. Our amendment also adjusts the timelines to account for this.

I appreciate that this has involved quite a bit of workshopping back and forth between our offices for words which highlight what the government would like the public and the Assembly to be aware of as it moves forward with implementing this recommendation. I am glad our offices were able to work constructively on this together, and I think we have reached a pretty solid point.

We are glad to have collaborated on a new call for the ACT government to seek the establishment of an information-sharing system with the commonwealth entities to support the work of this review and a national agreement on review schemes. We think it is a good addition. Ultimately we want the development of this scheme to align with the government's original in-principle acceptance of the royal commission's recommendation, and we want this scheme to be based on outcomes from consultation with key stakeholders and people with disability.

The recommendation for a disability death review scheme is not new. It emerged from years of consultation, evidence gathering, expertise and lived experience. Considerable work has already gone into establishing why such a scheme is needed and what functions it must include. What comes next must be government action. Now is the time for the ACT government to begin pulling together its budget case to follow on from consultation and for the establishment of this review to have a timeline of January 2028.

We do not want this work to be quietly deprioritised or lost among future budget pressures because key decisions have been deferred until after the election, nor do we want progress to become difficult to scrutinise. Setting a clear timeframe creates opportunities for this Assembly to monitor the implementation and hold the government accountable through future estimates hearings. Ultimately our amendment seeks to ensure that we retain the original objective of this motion, which is to establish the highly recommended and long-awaited reform of an ACT disability death review.

I know this has received widespread support from other members in this place, and I do thank them, including you, Mr Assistant Speaker, for their support today. We must ensure that consultation leads to action, that commitments lead to implementation and that the recommendations of the royal commission are not left sitting on the shelf. We believe that an amended motion, with our amendments to the amendments, would achieve that balance, and I will commend my amendment to the Assembly.

I might also briefly speak, in the interest of time, to Ms Orr's further amendment, which she has yet to circulate. The Greens will not be supporting Ms Orr's amendment to our amendment to her amendment to my motion because we think it opens up a potentially dangerous back door, which the government could slip out of when it comes to getting this critical recommendation implemented as a matter of priority.

We have already included the caveat in our amendment that our proposed timeline of January 2028 for the establishment of the scheme is "subject to the outcomes of consultation". This means that should consultation reveal that a preferred model for a disability death review is one which includes a national agreement on review mechanisms and information-sharing agreements, then the timeline for establishment can and should be duly adjusted.

Furthermore, the mention of legislative processes and timeframes was already included in Ms Orr's original amendment, which we agreed to accept, which says:

> That this Assembly…
>
> … further notes that:
>
> > … new legislative powers will be required to establish a Disability Death Review Scheme that can compel information from organisations under the ACT's jurisdiction with drafting of proposed legislation being subject to standard processes and timeframes.

It is difficult to understand what the further amendment seeks to incorporate into the motion at this point in the debate beyond a potential contingency plan in case of ACT government inaction.

I also want to be clear that opening up the establishment of a territory death review scheme completely dependent upon commonwealth agreements is not what community and key disability advocacy organisations have told us that they want. We have been asked to progress this work in the ACT and to get things done with the levers available to us, and these are key organisations who have a deep understanding of our disability systems, as well as the intersection of territory and commonwealth systems. I just fear that that further amendment from the minister could be read as an unwillingness to fully commit to implementing this critical recommendation to establish a territory death review scheme for people with a disability.

MR EMERSON (Kurrajong) (3.53): I thank Miss Nuttall for bringing forward this important motion today. I would like to speak to the motion and to the amendments. The Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability, which handed down its findings in 2023, brought to the fore the shocking

lived experience of people with disability in this country. Over the four years during which the commission did their work, they received over 6,000 submissions and held over 1,400 private sessions to receive testimony from members of the disability community. The royal commission found that people with disability continue to die from preventable causes, yet governments across the country often lack a dedicated mechanism to understand why and to create links between deaths that might otherwise not seem connected.

Disability death review schemes are intended to identify systemic failures, learn lessons from deaths and drive reforms that save lives. At the core of this motion sits a principle that sat at the heart of the royal commission recommendation on this: it is absolutely inexcusable that we allow the disability community to experience higher rates of premature and potentially avoidable death. We need to move from a system that simply records deaths to one that learns from them. Where there are recurring preventable failures, we must know about them and what led to them so that they cannot happen again. Hopefully that is self-evident.

It is worth noting that this is not a recommendation that is coming to this place for the first time, of course. The recommendation was made in 2023 by the royal commission. As noted in the motion, the government already agreed in principle to establishing a disability death review scheme. The need for this reform has also been recognised multiple times in recommendations from the Standing Committee on Social Policy, which I chair. In the inquiry by the committee into annual and financial reports in both 2023-24 and 2024-25, the committee recommended the establishment of this scheme. In 2023-24 we did so politely, with recommendation 18 stating:

> The Committee recommends that the ACT Government establish a dedicated Death in Disability Care review function.

In 2024-25, we did so with more urgency, with recommendation 25 stating:

> The Committee recommends that the ACT Government urgently implement a disability death review function.

These recommendations, of course, did not come from nowhere. As Miss Nuttall remarked, the Official Visitors have been raising concerns about this. In their 2025-26 annual report, they said:

> Disability OVs continued to see deaths in disability care during 2025-26, and the most significant concern remains the absence of a dedicated disability death review mechanism in the ACT. Official Visitors and the Board have not observed any meaningful progress by the ACT Government towards implementing a disability death review scheme, nearly three years after the Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability recommended that disability death review schemes be established across Australia …

So the case for action has already been made, but this motion is also timely for another reason. Across Australia, we are seeing significant changes to the disability support landscape. The NDIS is undergoing substantial reform, support systems are shifting and the disability community is rightly concerned that people will slip through the cracks

and lives will be affected for the worse. During periods of transition like what we are now going through, oversight and accountability become even more important. We need confidence that people are not falling through gaps between systems; that emerging risks are identified and addressed early; and, importantly, that governments have the information they need to respond appropriately when things do go wrong.

A disability death review scheme is not about assigning blame about an individual's death after the fact. It is about identifying trends and patterns that might otherwise go unnoticed and ensuring that lessons are translated into meaningful improvements in policy, services and support for an already hugely vulnerable part of our community. It is also about recognising the dignity and value of every life, because every preventable death represents both an individual tragedy and an opportunity to understand what happened in order to prevent similar harms occurring to others.

Importantly, this motion proposes a considered and consultative approach, engaging with people with disability, their families, advocates and experts in the design of the scheme. That approach reflects the principles that reforms affecting people with disability should be informed by the voices and experiences of those very people. This is important reform and reform that has been delayed for too long. The lives of our disability community are at stake, and that must be our central focus.

For these reasons, I am really pleased to support this motion and very thankful that Miss Nuttall chose to bring it forward today. I would also like to thank her and her team for how they have engaged with me and my team in discussions on this motion, and I extend the same thanks to Minister Orr and her team that have been engaging with us throughout the process as well.

Of course, as reflected in the amendments, there are some disagreements about the final wording of the motion and what exactly we are calling for, but I suspect, based on those conversations, everyone is coming at it with the same values and intent, with a fair bit of good will and, importantly, a keen eagerness not just to keep talking about the need for a disability death review scheme in the ACT and recommending its establishment but to actually establish one.

To the amendments, I am happy with the initial sheet of amendments that has been moved by the minister, and Miss Nuttall's proposed amendment to those amendments we are considering now. I appreciate a slight shift in the sequencing of the words in this amendment, as requested by my office, to make clear that the timing of establishing the preferred model of a disability death review would be subject to the outcomes of consultation, and I think that does give scope for that timing to be changed, if it is absolutely necessary. That would be made clear through a consultation process.

I am a little bit concerned by the minister's proposed wording—and I have communicated this—which I think opens up a bit too much wiggle-room. I understand the concerns reflected in her remarks on the proposed amendments to Miss Nuttall's amendment to the minister's amendments, which would provide extra grounds on which a delay could be justified.

I think, again, as Miss Nuttall reflected, if consultation makes clear that January 2028 is not appropriate because further work is required, then that is okay. If the consultation

does not make that clear, then the government should deliver on this timeline because it has been called for, as I have reflected, for many years now in multiple different reviews, and this is something that is of critical importance to our community.

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) (4.00): I seek leave to move my second amendment.

Leave granted.

MS ORR: I move:

> In paragraph (2)(e), after "outcomes of", insert:
>
> "consultation, as well as considerations of an information sharing system with the Commonwealth and legislative processes and timeframes as applicable".

For those listening along who cannot see all the paper in front of them, what we have here is a new clause (e) which is looking at establishing a death review in the ACT, subject to the outcomes of consultation.

As Miss Nuttall has said in her remarks, in her view, this takes into account if the preferred model includes information that would require information-sharing provisions across government and gives an out. The way I read this though, is that once the preferred model has been established, it is to be implemented. That is the bit that I am uncomfortable with; therefore, my amendment adds in further wording which is: " … as well as considerations of an information sharing system with the Commonwealth and legislative processes and timeframes as applicable".

This is to make explicit what I think has, essentially, been agreed by the speakers in their conversations today: that should the further consultation on the death review find what every other consultation and the royal commission has found to date, which is that this should be a scheme that is done in cooperation with the commonwealth agencies, we would not progress with doing something that does not include that. So that is the reason for the first part in there. It is not a backdoor. It is an explicit recognition of what everyone is saying is implicit within the amendment, and if it is implicit, I do not see why it is a problem to make it explicit.

The other reason I have put "timeframes" there goes to the drafting. While it is in the notes section, the notes section is not the same as the "calls on". The "calls on" is the one that actually provides the actions, and what I am asking for there is noting that consultation on a preferred model is to finish in June and that the establishment is to happen by January 2028. Noting that we will not actually, probably, have a sitting until February, we would need to have this put into the Assembly as legislation, if this does need to be legislated, prior to the end of 2027. It is just the timing; it does not work. If we are finishing in June, if it is a complex bill, we need to provide drafting instructions to the PCO. They need six months. If we need to do this, and have it introduced and passed to the Assembly by a particular date, none of it adds up.

I am sorry, because I have got different pieces of paper—I think it is June 2027 and January 2028, so it still works, six months. Hence, I put in there the "legislative processes and timeframes as applicable", because, Mr Speaker, I cannot direct the PCO to do something in a certain period of time. Their own guidelines note that trying to do something too quickly, particularly when it is complex, can very easily result in unintended consequences, and this is not the type of legislation or reform that we want to get wrong through haste.

In addition to that, there are the Assembly processes that we need to work through, and they have a time component too. Again, this is wanting to reflect that the portions that are not within my control are not something that I am expressly held accountable for. Again, I think this has been covered by Miss Nuttall in her comments saying the "notes that" is there and that it is understood that is part of it and is accepted by the Assembly. Again, I would say that if it is implicit, I do not see why it could not be explicit.

But given the comments that have been made in today's debate, I will take it that the Assembly acknowledges that there still needs to be an endorsement by the community of a proposed model and that, if that model is not within our sole jurisdictional ability to deliver, there is scope for reconsideration of implementation, and that timeframes and processes, particularly for external parties to the government, can be taken into account as well.

I make that point, and I have expressed this to Miss Nuttall and her office throughout all this discussion, because my big concern is that if the Assembly provides me with a requirement to stand up a scheme by a date, I will have to do that, irrespective of whether we can actually achieve what is wanting to be achieved through this. I do not think that is a good outcome, and it is not something that we should be pursuing.

The other part I would go to with those timeframes is that there is no opportunity for me to go through our budgetary processes and get resourcing to do the review of this scheme, which means that we will need to do it within our base funding. That means that other priorities that are currently carried out through our base funding may need to be reprioritised or discontinued. So that is something that I will look at, as to how we handle that, and I will come back to the Assembly with any consequences of that so that all members have the information.

So, certainly, while I can be comfortable with the commentary that has been provided in the speeches, I still have a level of discomfort with the wording in Miss Nuttall's amendment, and while mine might not get support, I am certainly much happier with the commentary that has been provided, and the comfort that that provides, than not moving an amendment at all and not having any clarity.

Ms Orr's amendments to **Miss Nuttall's** amendment to **Ms Orr's** proposed amendments negatived.

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

Ms Orr's proposed amendments, as amended, agreed to.

MISS NUTTALL (Brindabella) (4.08), in reply: I sincerely thank all members for their

engagement on this debate, including Minister Orr, Mr Cain, Mr Emerson and Ms Carrick, with whom I had great conversations. It is clear to me that all of us vehemently agree that this scheme needs to be established. It is clear to all of us that we need a means in the ACT of systemically reviewing the deaths of people with disability. We need this function so that we understand what we need to do to change the system.

It appears that we disagree on the timeframe in which to get this done. The reason we sought to re-insert the establishment of the scheme and did so with a defined due date is so that the government would remain accountable for delivering the scheme itself. The ACT Greens believe we cannot afford to keep kicking the can down the road and want to establish a clear point of accountability where we report back to the community on whether the scheme has been achieved in this point of the term. That should be the north star of this motion: the establishment of the scheme. We agree that a scheme should be able to share information with the commonwealth. The scheme should be as comprehensive as humanly possible, but the establishment of an agreed information-sharing system, or lack thereof, should not stop the ACT government from starting the work.

At this point, it is worth reflecting on the fact that the New South Wales Ombudsman held a disability death review function until 2022, when it was cut without community consultation. A good four years before that, in 2018, the New South Wales Ombudsman said:

> In relation to the deaths of people with disability in residential care in NSW, we are working with the NDIS Commission on a joint approach that should enhance the work in this critical area. This will include the NDIS Commission examining the involvement of NDIS providers, while my office will maintain our ongoing review of the health and other service systems in NSW. We welcome the opportunity afforded by the joint arrangements to continue this vital work, with a view to potentially informing a national approach to reviewing the deaths of people with disability.

According to the royal commission's final report in September 2018, the New South Wales Ombudsman finalised operational arrangements with the NDIS commission and state coroner to guide that joint approach. The New South Wales Ombudsman said:

> [T]he arrangements in NSW during 2018/19 may also provide a template for other jurisdictions to consider, and potentially lead to a national approach to reviewing the deaths of people with disability and to identifying strategies for reducing deaths.

I infer from this that the New South Wales Ombudsman absolutely saw a role for the disability death review function in states and territories. We have had the blueprint for about eight years. The New South Wales Ombudsman's recommendations made tangible positive changes. Because of those recommendations, the New South Wales government implemented minimum requirements to address swallowing risks in government operated and funded accommodation.

Government, as a result of the recommendations, developed a service framework to improve health care for people with intellectual disabilities. The Ombudsman secured a requirement that all funded disability services and licensed boarding houses had to

have someone with first aid training on shift at all times. They directed development of screening tools, fact sheets, better record-keeping practices and genuine practical improvements. Those are things that we could have within our current system from the blueprint the New South Wales Ombudsman provided us. Those are things we should be actively working towards.

I thank all members for their engagement and look forward to seeing a disability death review scheme implemented in the ACT in this term of government.

Original question, as amended, resolved in the affirmative.

Health—specialist waiting lists

MR PARTON (Brindabella—Leader of the Opposition) (4.12): I seek leave to amend my notice in the terms that have been circulated in the chamber, specifically version 2.

Leave granted.

MR PARTON: I move:

That this Assembly:

(1) notes that:

(a) more than 65,000 people are waiting for specialist outpatient appointments across Canberra Health Services (CHS);

(b) CHS has begun to advise patients that appointment referral criteria have been reviewed and updated;

(c) patients with existing referrals have subsequently been advised that their referrals no longer meet the revised criteria and have been closed;

(d) retrospective changes to referral criteria and the communication method has caused significant distress and may leave patients who have already experienced significant wait-times for specialist care without access to the appointment they were medically referred to receive; and

(e) if, following a clinical reassessment, it is determined that the patient should remain on the waiting list, they will retain their original position on the waiting list;

(2) expresses concern that patients and families who have waited, in some cases for years, may lose access to specialist assessment through changes to eligibility criteria made after their referrals were received; and

(3) calls on the Minister for Health to:

(a) immediately instruct CHS to:

(i) reconsider and improve the method of how these changes to service eligibility are communicated to patients;

(ii) ensure that existing referrals remain active and are assessed under the criteria applicable when the referral was accepted, unless a CHS clinician determines in consultation with the referring practitioner and patient that the patient's circumstances warrant a different course of action;

(iii) ensure that any decision to close an existing referral is based on an individual clinical assessment, with clear reasons provided to and in consultation with the patient and their referring practitioner; and

(iv) ensure that changes to referral criteria do not compromise patient safety or prevent patients from accessing clinically necessary specialist assessment; and

(v) particularly ensuring that the clinical needs and vulnerability of patients are considered by clinicians when decisions are made about their ongoing specialist outpatient care; and

(b) report to the Assembly on the implementation of these measures and the number of existing referrals closed as a result of changes to eligibility criteria by the last sitting day of 2026.

Every Canberran who is referred to a specialist should be able to trust that their referral will be treated fairly, that their clinical needs will be considered and that they will not be left navigating an increasingly difficult health system without answers, but, for the more than 65,000 people waiting for specialist outpatient appointments across Canberra Health Services, that trust is being tested.

These are not simply numbers on a spreadsheet; they are people living with pain, uncertainty and symptoms that may be affecting their ability to work, care for their families or enjoy their lives. They are parents trying to get answers for their children. They are people who have done exactly what the health system asked them to do, and that is see a GP, obtain a referral and wait their turn. That is what they have been doing: they have been waiting patiently—some of them for years—and now patients have been told that their existing referrals no longer meet the revised eligibility criteria and their referrals have been closed. That is the advice they have been given. Imagine waiting years for a specialist appointment and believing that you are progressing through the system only to be told that the rules have changed and you are no longer eligible for the care that you were referred to receive. Imagine the confusion, the distress and the uncertainty that creates for the patient and their family.

I think this approach is shameful. It raises questions about the advice that was provided to the minister to agree to this approach. We often hear about the serious and potentially deadly results in delayed access to diagnosis and care, but this is clearly not an influencing factor in the way that this government approaches health care. The question before the Assembly is straightforward: is it fair to change the criteria after a patient has already been referred and accepted into the system and then close their referral because they no longer meet the new criteria? I do not believe it is.

Let me be clear: there is nothing wrong with reviewing specialist services, improving referral pathways or ensuring that patients are prioritised according to their clinical needs. Nobody could argue with that.

Ms Stephen-Smith: As long as you don't act on the outcomes of the review!

MR PARTON: Those are legitimate and necessary responsibilities of a health service. I think even the former health minister was agreeing in her interjection. I did not quite hear it. But there is a fundamental difference between improving how a health service operates and changing the rules for patients who are already waiting. If CHS believes

that a patient's circumstances need to be re-assessed, then that re-assessment should be conducted on its clinical merits. It should involve appropriate consultation with the patient and their referring practitioner, it should be explained clearly, and it should not be used as an administrative shortcut to remove people from waiting lists. Most importantly, if that re-assessment determines that a patient still requires specialist care, they should retain their original position on the waiting list.

The motion that we are moving recognises that there are practical and human consequences to how these decisions are made and how they are communicated. Firstly, we want the minister to instruct CHS to reconsider and improve how changes to service eligibility are communicated to patients. A letter advising someone that their referral has been closed is not enough if it leaves them confused about the reasons, their options or what they need to do next. Clearly, that confusion exists for a large number of people. Patients deserve clear information, they deserve to understand the clinical reasoning behind a decision, and they deserve to know how they can seek a review if they disagree.

We want existing referrals to remain active and to be assessed under the criteria applicable when they were accepted, unless a CHS clinician determines, in consultation with the referring practitioner and the patient, that their circumstances warrant a different course of action. That is a reasonable safeguard. It preserves the ability of clinicians to make appropriate decisions while protecting patients from arbitrary or purely administrative changes. Where a clinical re-assessment determines that a patient should remain on the waiting list, that patient should retain their original position. A change in eligibility criteria should not, by itself, erase the time that they have already waited.

We want to ensure that patients, particularly the most vulnerable, are not left without a viable pathway to care because of cost. If the public system closes a referral, patients may face the prospect of paying privately or travelling interstate to obtain the specialist assessment they need, and many of them will. For families already under financial pressure, those options may simply be out of reach. I do not think we can accept a system in which access to necessary care depends on a family's ability to absorb additional costs when the public pathway fails them.

We hear persistent concerns about workplace culture, management and governance in our public health system. We now have nurses and midwives warning of potential industrial action amid stalled pay negotiations and concerns about respect in the workplace. At the same time, patients are experiencing significant barriers to accessing specialist services. These are distinct issues. They each deserve to be addressed on merit, but together they raise important questions about leadership, accountability and the effectiveness of health system management. The government has not heeded the numerous warnings delivered over the last decade from the various internal and independent reviews or by the countless red flags raised by staff and patients about the challenges in the system and this government's approach to managing healthcare services in the ACT. What we are now starting to see is that the entire service is crumbling.

A health system depends on more than buildings, budgets and clinical guidelines. It depends on capable leadership, effective administration, a respected workforce, and systems that put patients first. When management decisions create uncertainty for

patients, when communication fails to explain what happens next, and when staff are raising concerns about their working conditions, the government must take those concerns seriously. Poor management and a weak workplace culture can have consequences that extend beyond the workplace. They can affect how services operate, how problems are identified and resolved, and how confidently patients can navigate that system.

The motion is a modest but important step towards doing that. It does not seek to dictate clinical decisions and it does not prevent CHS from improving its services or ensuring that patients receive the right care at the right time; it asks for fairness, transparency and accountability when existing referrals are affected by changes to eligibility criteria. Every patient on a waiting list is a person with a health need. They should not be treated as an administrative problem to be resolved by changing the rules. The government has a responsibility to ensure that the management of waiting lists translates into better access to care, not simply different numbers on a report.

I urge the Assembly to support this motion. I call on the minister to instruct CHS to ensure that patients who have already waited for specialist care are treated fairly, their clinical needs remain paramount and their time spent waiting is respected. I thank the minister, her staff and CHS personnel for the briefing this morning. We much appreciate that. I also thank members of the crossbench for the way that they have engaged on this matter. I commend the amended motion to the Assembly.

MS VASSAROTTI (Kurrajong) (4.21): I rise to speak in support of Mr Parton's motion on specialist outpatient waitlists. I thank Mr Parton for bringing this motion to the chamber. There has been a lot of discussion about this issue, both publicly and within this house, over the last little while. I also thank the minister for briefings that she provided to me and my staff late last week. I want to reflect on the fact that us working through this issue and getting to a place where people feel that it is a positive contribution shows the parliament working well, even when there are quite tricky issues to work through. I acknowledge that was the case across the board.

At its core, this motion asks us to consider what services our public health system should provide and whether patients who need specialist care are being given genuine alternatives before they are removed from waiting lists. Aligning ACT outpatient eligibility criteria with contemporary clinical guidelines may seem reasonable. If current guidelines indicate that a patient with a particular condition can be managed by a GP rather than a specialist, then it is entirely appropriate to review referral pathways. However, the responsibility does not lie there. Canberra Health Services must ensure that patients can actually access the alternative care that is being proposed.

GPs do not refer patients to public specialist outpatient clinics lightly. They are well aware that waiting times can be lengthy, particularly for non-urgent cases. In most instances, a referral is made because the GP believes specialist care is necessary and there is no suitable alternative available to the patient. Also, it is unrealistic to assume that everyone can simply be directed back to primary care. Many Canberrans already struggle to access timely GP appointments and many do not have an ongoing relationship with a regular GP because they are forced to see whichever doctor is available. Urgent care clinics do not solve this problem. What the patient needs is affordable and continuous access to primary care. That is why it is concerning that

patients are being removed from specialist waiting lists without the assurance that they will have another clinically appropriate pathway available to them.

The Walsh review did not recommend removing patients from waiting lists without ensuring alternative options are in place, nor is it sufficient to point out that the ACT's criteria are now consistent with those used in New South Wales. If neighbouring jurisdictions apply the same criteria, travelling interstate will not provide a solution. Unless viable alternative care pathways are available, the practical effect is that patients are being told to seek private treatment, yet, if they were in a financial position to do that, many of them would never have joined the public waiting list in the first place. Without ensuring that patients can genuinely access GP-led care or another clinically appropriate option, the government is effectively adopting a let-them-eat-cake approach to health care.

The government has stated that the review has only so far been applied to the paediatric allergy waiting list. However, we are hearing from patients on other waiting lists who say they have also been removed, and some of those stories are deeply concerning. One patient with terminal cancer and only months left to live reported being moved from a palliative care waiting list. Another patient was reportedly removed from a surgical waiting list because the doctor advised that the two procedures should not be performed within the same week. Rather than being deferred, they were taken off the list entirely.

Equally troubling is the way these changes have been communicated. Patients have been left confused, distressed and uncertain about where to turn next. It is concerning that some of the lessons we should have learnt from previous processes, such as the Growing and Renewing program, may not have been learnt. The government has been given clear advice that these types of communications should include information about review and appeal processes, and that may not have been done in this case.

Also, genuine consultation with key medical bodies and stakeholders must occur before changes of this magnitude are implemented. An important distinction needs to be made. It is entirely reasonable for a patient to be redirected from one specialist to another clinician who is better placed to provide care. It is quite another matter to remove a patient from a waiting list simply because demand is so high that they may be waiting for years.

If patients were offered practical alternatives, this would be a different conversation. The government could say, "Given the current waiting times, we will arrange and find another pathway for your care, whether it be telehealth services, a GP with special interests or an e-consult model that supports your GP to manage your condition." But that is not what is happening. Instead, the approach appears to have been: "If a non-urgent patient is removed from the list, the waiting list becomes shorter." That may improve the statistic, but that will not improve patient care.

It is clear that we need to think laterally and look at alternatives that might be available. These will be discussed at a roundtable that I am hosting on 5 November. This is a contribution that we are making to generate conversation about how we can provide care differently. We want to look at solutions, not just throw up our hands and say, "It's all too hard." Every person who requires specialist care through the public health system should be able to access that care in some form.

If waiting times are unacceptably long, the government should address the underlying causes by recruiting and retaining more specialists and, in the meantime, ensuring patients have access to alternative and clinically appropriate services. Take the example of a category 3 dermatology patient. It may well be true that, under current circumstances, they are unlikely to ever be seen. But the answer is not simply to remove them from the list and expect them to fend for themselves; the answer is to create alternative pathways while maintaining the waiting list as a safety net, should those alternatives prove unsuitable or inaccessible.

This matters for both ethical and practical reasons. Public health care should not be reserved only for acute and urgent cases. When people cannot access specialist care or are removed from waiting lists without alternatives, their conditions are more likely to deteriorate. Eventually, many will require more intensive treatment or hospitalisation. This is not a good outcome for patients; nor is it a good outcome for the ACT budget.

The government cannot focus solely on the cost of providing outpatient specialist services; it must also consider the cost of failing to provide them. Early intervention and ongoing care are often far less expensive than treating preventable deterioration later on. For these reasons, we support Mr Parton's amended motion.

MS CARRICK (Murrumbidgee) (4.30): I thank Mr Parton for bringing forward this important motion about key challenges facing our public health system. Canberra Health Services has advised that more than 65,000 people are currently waiting for specialist outpatient appointments, sometimes for years. This is not a sustainable situation. Long waiting lists are frustrating for patients, difficult for clinicians, and indicative of broader capacity pressures across the health system.

I acknowledge that CHS is attempting to address these pressures. The review of outpatient services follows recommendations from the independent review of the ACT health system and seeks to ensure specialist services are directed to those with the greatest clinical need. This is a legitimate objective. I understand that clinical practices change and health systems need a degree of flexibility to meet the changing needs of the community. However, like others, I have concerns about the retrospective application of revised eligibility criteria for patients who are already accepted for specialist assessment and have already spent months—in some cases years—waiting their turn. Some of these patients have delayed seeking alternative treatment because they rely on the public system. To simply advise them years later that they no longer qualify raises legitimate concerns about procedural fairness, transparency and patient safety. I am also concerned about decisions being made without proper consultation with patients and their referring practitioners. Clinical decisions should be based on individual circumstances, not solely on administrative priorities.

This motion strikes an appropriate balance. It does not stop the government from reviewing outpatient services; nor does it prevent referral criteria from being updated. It simply says that people who entered the system under one set of rules should not lose access because those rules changed while they were waiting. It calls for existing referrals to be assessed under the criteria that applied when they were accepted, unless a clinician determines, in consultation with the referring practitioner and patient, that the patient's circumstances warrant a different course of action. The motion seeks

assurance that patient safety remains paramount.

I understand that these changes will increase the administrative burden of managing specialist outpatient waitlists. However, I believe they are reasonable safeguards that keep people at the centre of the process. For those reasons, I support the amended motion.

MR EMERSON (Kurrajong) (4.32): I thank Mr Parton for bringing forward this important motion today and doing so after this issue was brought to light by local parent and powerful community advocate, Dr Liz Allen, and others who have spoken out about this. Families across our community are feeling deeply anxious and let down this week. A thousand of them have learned via letter that their child has been kicked off the Canberra Health Services' Paediatric Allergy Clinic outpatient waitlist with no prior warning, because "Your referral no longer meets the criteria for a specialist appointment with CHS."

As was confirmed during this morning's briefing arranged by the minister on this matter—and I thank her for arranging that quickly with multiple members and for arranging officials to be there to answer our questions; it was very insightful—the number equates to a substantial majority of the patients who were on that waitlist. Not only are families and parents rightly concerned about what their child will do next; they are also deeply concerned by how the waiting lists at Canberra Health Services are being managed or are going to be managed. That goes to the core of the motion from Mr Parton today.

The manner in which this change has been communicated in the case of the Paediatric Allergy Clinic waitlist is callous. To have referral criteria change retrospectively with no prior warning and to find that existing referrals have simply been closed is deeply distressing to parents. To be frank, I find it an inappropriate way to handle this issue, especially given—as it seems from what we are hearing—that many of the referrals that have been closed appear to actually meet the new eligibility criteria.

I completely understand the need for work on our outpatient waitlists. It is unacceptable that the total number of people waiting for an outpatient appointment stands at over 65,000. I welcome that Canberra Health Services are reviewing these waitlists and considering options to address this problem. We should also be looking at how we got here to begin with. These are significant wait times. We heard during question time that it is immoral—I think that was the language used—to keep families waiting for such a long time without actually being honest about whether they would get an appointment, but that is what has been happening.

I am glad it is being addressed now, but I am concerned about what parents and families are concerned about, beyond the impact on their own children. It is about the way that this change has occurred in the case of the Paediatric Allergy Clinic waitlist, who was consulted about this change prior to it being implemented or who was not consulted, and how the changes were communicated. The last point is the key point.

We have heard many stories from Canberrans who have received letters in the past week or so. "My daughter is one of those affected," said one person. "Following a severe allergic reaction requiring two doses of adrenaline, she waited over three years,

only to have her referral closed without specialist assessment." One child's referral dated back to 2018, and that referral was closed. A child with an allergy to a range of unknown things, which are still unknown, has been to the emergency department for treatment and, after three years of waiting, their referral was closed despite the hospital doctors saying she needs a full assessment through the outpatient clinic.

Another child who had a severe anaphylactic reaction caused by a small amount of peanut butter, which led to a hypertensive collapse and nearly needing CPR, has been on the waitlist for two years, and their referral was closed despite the emergency department doctors and their GP saying she needs outpatient care. The child's parent is right to ask, "If my daughter doesn't fit the criteria, who does?" These are just a few of the examples that we have heard, and we have since been informed, as I mentioned, that over 1,000 people received the letters over the last week or so. How many more of these kinds of stories haven't we heard that are being shared in our community today and over the last few days?

My office has been informed by the Royal Australian College of General Practitioners that they found out about this in the media and that they were not consulted, and they are still unsure of what the changes to the criteria actually are and, therefore, how they will impact GPs or their patients. Why? Why weren't they consulted on the criteria changes and forewarned that this was about to be communicated to families? Families who have been on this waitlist for years were, without warning, sent a letter saying, "The criteria have changed. You're off the waitlist. Get in touch with your GP to discuss it with them," and without being told what the criteria are or exactly why they do not meet them.

What we have since learned is that families may be re-instated to their spot on the waitlist if their GP refers them back to the clinic under the new criteria, but that was not mentioned in the letter either. To me, that is a pretty terrible miscommunication mistake that probably warrants an apology to families and, more importantly than that, for this to be communicated as quickly as possible to everyone who has received the letter. As much as I would like to think they are listening to the debate today, they might miss some of this information. It is critical that families are aware, especially those whose stories I have recounted would meet the new criteria and should be back on the waitlist, based on my non-clinical understanding of the criteria.

We are hearing from parents who have genuine and justified anxiety about the care and safety of their children. This is particularly true for families managing severe allergy risks and the constant frightening risk of anaphylaxis, where timely access to specialist care is critical, and need to understand the cause. Many of these families have been on the waitlist for years and could not see a specialist, even after a suspected anaphylactic event.

Closing a referral does not address the underlying medical need in our community. Closing a referral does not help a child or their parents understand their condition. All closing a referral does is shift the burden back onto families—many families who have already waited years for answers and many families who, despite that long wait, trusted that their appointment would come.

To illustrate the human impact of these administrative decisions, I want to share the

words of a community member who has been impacted by this—a registered nurse of over 20 years whose daughter was removed from the Paediatric Allergy Clinic waitlist after having waited for more than three years—and reached out to my office about it. They would prefer to remain anonymous. I note that their statement comes from their position as a parent. They said:

> I'm a nurse. I'm trained to know what to do when someone can't breathe. But nothing prepares you for when that someone is your own child. Watching my daughter's face swell, hives spread across her body and her breathing become difficult was terrifying. She needed two doses of adrenaline. I've spent over two decades working as a registered nurse. I've treated allergies and anaphylaxis many times. I know how to recognise an emergency and respond. But I don't know how to stop it happening to my little girl again.
>
> We still don't have the answers we desperately need. Living with the possibility of another severe allergic reaction, without knowing the cause, is like constantly looking over your shoulder, with one hand tied behind your back. Every outing, every adventure, every new experience becomes another risk assessment. We plan, we prepare, we carry adrenaline, and hope we'll never need it.
>
> For more than three years, we waited for an appointment at Canberra Hospital's Paediatric Allergy Clinic. That referral represented hope. Hope for answers, understanding and confidence in keeping our daughter safe. Then a letter arrived telling us her referral had been closed. It felt like watching the last lifeboat leave the Titanic, without us on board. I didn't know what to do. And I still don't. If this is how I feel, as a nurse who has managed anaphylaxis professionally, I cannot imagine how other parents must feel.
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> We live in regional NSW. Canberra is our specialist referral centre, half a day's travel each way. Sydney is a full day's travel each way. That means accommodation, lost income and more barriers to care. So I ask Canberra Health Services: who decided my daughter no longer needed specialist assessment? Was her individual clinical risk reviewed? What changed about her medical needs while we waited? Where are we supposed to go now? And how many other families have received the same letter?
>
> I understand the pressures on healthcare. I've worked within the system for over 20 years. But closing a referral doesn't make the medical problem disappear. It simply transfers the uncertainty, responsibility and risk back onto families. I'm not asking for special treatment. I'm asking that patients be treated as people, not numbers on a waiting list. Because behind every closed referral is a family still waiting for answers.

I really thank this parent for having the courage to share those words with the Assembly. They serve as a reminder that managing waitlists must never come at the expense of patient safety. Of course, we can all agree to that or to honest, basic human compassion. Surely it is not okay to administratively shift vulnerable children off lists without proper individual assessment, transparent criteria, wide and appropriate consultation, and clear pathways forward for children and their parents.

One positive from those letters sent out over the last week is the warning that more of these may be coming for other waitlists. It was very helpful to get a briefing to understand the process that is underway. Now that we in the Assembly know what may

be happening, we can play our part in monitoring the situation and ensuring both accountability and increased transparency for our community.

I understand that, from an administrative level, this is a genuinely difficult problem. There are no easy answers—I really do appreciate that—but sending a letter to a family that has been on a waitlist for years for a serious medical condition and telling them they are off the waitlist unless they can prove they should be back on it cannot be the answer. To me, it feels a bit like Robodebt, not in the way the decisions were made but in how they were communicated: "You owe the government a debt unless you can prove you don't;" "You're off the waitlist unless you can prove you shouldn't be."

Our community expects better. Canberrans expect real consultation, genuine accountability and a healthcare system that treats patients as people, not as statistics. Unfortunately, that is not what has happened here. I am really pleased that the Assembly has banded together on this motion to say it is not good enough. We need to do better next time. Please, when we do, let's work closely with GPs, work with Canberrans and work with us across the Assembly to get this right ahead of time.

I am pleased to support this motion today. I again thank Mr Parton for bringing it forward. The amendments to the motion were negotiated through conversations with the minister and my office, and I am sure with others. I think they are very sensible. We have landed on a position that respects the challenge, respects the problems that need to be resolved, and acknowledges that the way that this has occurred in this particular case is not up to scratch and needs to be remedied for this case and for future examples of this issue.

DR PATERSON (Murrumbidgee—Minister for Health, Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Police, Fire and Emergency Services, and Minister for Gaming Reform) (4.43): I do want to start by acknowledging the angst felt by some families around this process, and I thank members for bringing the motion to the Assembly. I do also want to recognise the clinicians within Canberra Health Services and the health workers there that feel very, very deeply passionate about supporting our community and providing best-practice care to our community, so I do think it is a little unfair to describe this in the same context as robodebt. This was a very long and well-thought-out process in terms of an assessment of clinical guidelines for the paediatric allergy clinic.

As members have noted, currently CHS has 65,000 people waiting on our outpatient waiting lists. Some of these people, in particular some of these children, have been on these waiting lists for many, many years. CHS and the government recognise the need to establish better systems to understand who is on the list, get people to their first appointments more quickly and examine the referral criteria for the services. These reforms are not about making our waitlist data more favourable or appealing. They are about making our waitlist data more transparent. They are about ensuring the community receives the appropriate and timely best-practice care that they deserve. This entire outpatient reform process has been driven by clinicians and has been informed by specialist clinical expertise.

To answer some of Mr Emerson's questions put by the constituent, there were clinicians that reviewed every single one of those cases. How these criteria were assessed was against national standards, against other similar paediatric allergy clinics in other

jurisdictions and against national strategies and guidelines. The review also considered service delivery models in comparable jurisdictions. For some services in the outpatient review where the criteria is already in line with best practice, the criteria for that particular service will not change. For others, such as the paediatric allergy clinic, where the clinical need needed to be updated or amended, this will be changed and will require some form of a process to notify patients on that list.

I would also like to speak to Michael Walsh's inquiry into the ACT health system and data demand processes. Minister Stephen-Smith, in May this year, tabled Michael Walsh's report in the Assembly, and part of the recommendations out of that report discussed the importance of improving processes in outpatients to give more transparency to patients. Walsh identified feedback from stakeholders regarding the need for the introduction of streamlined referrals and more consistent criteria. That work has been well underway in the paediatric allergy clinic.

CHS has also done significant work around this to move the outpatient work forward. This includes the outpatient clinical services plan, which requires an analysis of current service performance, future service modelling, demand forecasting and recommendations to improve access, patient flow and sustainability. The review will identify opportunities to expand care closer to home for virtual care and telehealth and community-based service delivery supported by high-level workforce, digital and infrastructure planning and a phased implementation roadmap. In line with these recommendations, the outpatient oversight committee is now overseeing this systemic approach to auditing and reviewing outpatient waiting lists and to reviewing the referral criteria for the services.

I think it is important to say that we will always seek to reflect on the way we do things. We will always strive to be better and do better. While this work was initiated by clinicians and commenced prior to Walsh, the need to undertake this work more broadly meant that the paediatric allergy clinic was the first service to be reviewed under a consistent and coordinated approach, with the structure and governance processes behind it. We knew this work would be challenging. I think it was very clear from the briefing this morning just how much Canberra Health Services and the clinicians want to support families and our community through this process.

I will speak to the fact that in the ACT we still have a very highly accessible clinic. In other jurisdictions, Sydney and Melbourne, where they have similar paediatric allergy clinics they will require a paediatrician referral to those clinics. You cannot refer straight from your GP to those clinics. In terms of the ACT, we still have a really inclusive clinic, where referrals can occur from a GP to the allergy clinic.

I also want to say some of the stories about children having anaphylactic reactions and their referrals being cancelled are very disturbing to hear. It is absolutely a key criteria of the clinic that if a child has experienced anaphylaxis, they be seen in this clinic. I think what those stories do allude to is the fact that the knowledge of the service of CHS or the referral of the GPs or the communication between different parts of the service clearly is not there, and these people have been waiting for years.

As part of this process, it really is about encouraging families who continue to be concerned about their child and whose referral has been closed to contact CHS to seek

a review of their referral. Also I do think it is timely to go back to a GP to seek an overview of and analysis of the symptoms. The GPs across Canberra, regarding these referrals, have been notified on the updated criteria as well, so they will be able to provide informed advice to the families about whether they should be referred back to the service.

As we said in many of our conversations, if a family is referred back to the service, then they will not lose their place in the queue. In fact, with the revision of services, it may become more clinically necessary to see that individual in a much quicker timeline than what they currently were. In many other clinical services there is a requirement after every year for a renewal of a referral to the clinic. That process has not been occurring in the paediatric allergy clinic and I think speaks to the fact that many of these families have been on these waiting lists for many years. We absolutely acknowledge that that is unacceptable. That is not what we want see. We want to see children getting the specialist care that they may require.

I acknowledge this is a process. I do want to allay concerns. I received advice this morning that there have been three people that have contacted Canberra Health Services to seek a review of the closure of their referral. We will work with those people. I have had a couple of constituents contact my office, but we have not been inundated with calls and concerns through this process. It is just at the beginning of this process, and many of these people will go back to their GPs and then may re-enter the service.

I do want to assure the community that this was a balanced approach. There was consultation done on the letters before they went out. As we heard in the briefing this morning, the advantage of sending a letter is that a letter provides consistent information to everyone, so the family receives the same information that the GP will receive. Consistent information in these types of circumstances is really important.

There has been discussion about whether phone calls would have been more appropriate, but I am sure everyone here can appreciate that making a thousand phone calls is a very significant task. It is also a task that would not be appropriate for a clinical administrative person to make because they would be discussing clinical situations and circumstances. It would have to be a specialist making those calls. I am sure everyone here would prefer that specialist immunologists are spending their time seeing the most critical patients in the territory rather than making phone calls.

We appreciate that that is a large number of people, but many of those people will have moved out of the territory. Many of those children will have aged out of the service. Many of those people would have sought care somewhere else. Many of those people will have forgotten they were even on the waiting list,

It is a challenge. We are a government and a health service that is very committed to these really hard reform projects. As we have talked about, this is the beginning of the work on the outpatient list. There will be other lists that we will work through with clinicians. It will be clinician led. Some services will not need their clinical guidelines updated and so will have to approach the waiting lists from different perspectives, if that needs more investment in staffing to get those waitlists down et cetera. Not every single patient service will require clinical review.

One of the most urgent and outdated waitlists that had significant numbers on it—most concerningly to Canberra Health Services had significant numbers of children—was the paediatric allergy clinic, so it was timely. The referral criteria for the service previously was very, very outdated. It was really important to do this work to see the review of the criteria.

I acknowledge all the members' inputs into the debate today and thank everyone. I really do remain committed to working with each of you. We do have a major system of reform to come. I am very happy to provide briefings and information to seek the support to be able to make the changes and improve Canberra Health Services to be able to better support Canberrans. I support Mr Parton's amendments.

MR COCKS (Murrumbidgee) (4.56): I just wanted to reflect that this has been a pretty astounding process to witness going on in the community first and then on some of the discussion here today. Twenty-three years ago John Howard was speaking at the 20th anniversary of Medicare. He said, "Our world-class public health system"—

Mr Barr: Such a well-known supporter of Medicare, wasn't he?

MR COCKS: I think that it might help the Chief Minister to listen to what was actually said at this point rather than sticking to the tired Labor tropes around exactly where different people stood. It might benefit him to listen for a change, because John Howard did say at that time:

> Today is the 20th anniversary of Medicare—our world-class public health system, which delivers universal health care for all Australians.
>
> All Australians have the right to universal access to the three pillars of Medicare: a universal Medicare rebate for medical services; a universal Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme; universal access to free public hospital care.

The Labor Party likes to stand up and pretend they are the only people who care about Medicare. They like to wave around the Medicare card and suggest that they are the only ones standing up for it, but it is not true—absolutely it is not true. I did think that actually they believed it in their hearts. I was quite surprised today to hear the former health minister making a range of comments that really seem to go against that universal access principle, sticking up for retrospectively removing people from waiting lists, for retrospectively removing children who need healthcare services from waiting lists and sending them back to private health care to try and get back onto it, because that does not really sound like universal care to me.

Then there is the current health minister, who got up and said, "This is not about making waitlists look more appealing." It is difficult to see it any other way. There is a truism in management, often attributed incorrectly to Peter Drucker, that what gets measured gets mapped. The idea is that you measure the right things, you do the right things and you will actually make a difference.

There is also of course Goodhart's law: when a metric becomes a target, people optimise for the metric rather than the actual goal. I think it is important to understand that the length of the medical waiting lists, a hospital waiting list, is the metric. The problem is that too many people are waiting too long for health care they need. It seems

to be a bit of a trend that when there is a problem for this government they make changes that fix the metric; they do not fix the underlying problem. Quite often we find out about these things by surprise.

Mr Emerson pointed to robodebt as a comparison, but I think actually there are more recent comparisons in the way the revenue office was managing some things here in the ACT. I think one of the key issues here is how people have been taken utterly by surprise by this. This is not a considered program that was well communicated to the community, well communicated to patients sitting on waiting lists, well communicated in this place. This is something where once again people received a letter in their letterbox saying, "Sorry, you're off the list. We know you've been waiting for a long time. Go back to your GP. They might be able to get you back on." GPs are private care. They are private health care. I do not know if you have tried to get a GP appointment recently, but it is not real easy in the ACT. It is not particularly cheap, and that means that people who are on low incomes actually do face a significant barrier to getting back on these waiting lists.

It is very difficult to see how this is anything other than the government managing impressions of problems, because it does not do anything to fix the underlying problem. It does not do anything to help the people who come up to me at mobile offices and at the shops. At Cooleman Court just the other week I had someone come up and talk about how they have been sitting on a waiting list for five years.

Dr Paterson: Which is why we need to do the reform.

MR COCKS: The minister says this is why we need this reform, because people have been sitting on a waiting list for five years. The minister's response tells us that what she wants to do is keep people off the waiting list. They have been waiting too long—too bad, so sad. Go home, get another referral. That is not the way you fix the problem. That is not good experience in health care. That is not universal access. That is trying to fix the impression in the media. It is trying to fix a publicity and public relations problem for the government, and they should hang their head in shame.

MR PARTON (Brindabella—Leader of the Opposition) (5.02): What is clear today is that the government has stuffed up monumentally, and to some extent I think they are keen to take some responsibility for that failure. It does not matter how you spin this with public service speak, to have your child sit on a specialist waiting list for years and then remove them with a stark letter—I think everyone can understand why people are upset.

I do want to thank Ms Vassarotti for her considered response to this motion. The Greens have been genuinely helpful to us arriving at this point, and our conversations with the Greens have been extremely positive in dealing with a challenging situation. I thank Ms Carrick for her contribution. I concur with her opening statements that the situation before us is unsustainable. Thanks to Ms Carrick for her support.

Mr Emerson's office has also engaged extremely constructively. He gets it. He fully understands the drama that this government misstep has caused, and I thank Mr Emerson. I note that later in the week we will debate a motion in Assembly business to secure some important information around this issue, and I thank him for driving that.

Regarding the minister's response, we feel for the position that she has been thrust into. I do note that I received an email from Dr Paterson at 9.20 pm last night seeking to assist those who contacted my office, and I believe that was an email that has come directly from the minister. I am kind of with the minister on the statement that this stuff-up is not quite at robodebt proportions. Despite that, I think the process is really difficult to defend. It has been pleasing to hear the minister say that she and the government will always seek to do better and that they are always learning.

I do reiterate that these problems are indicative of much wider problems that infect our health system like a disease. We recently reflected on 25 years of ACT Labor governing the territory, and I would note that ACT Labor inherited a nation-leading health system, and it ain't nation leading today. I commend the motion to the Assembly.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Papers
Motion to take note of papers

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

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

Richardson—shops—Assembly resolution 24 June 2025—government response

MISS NUTTALL (Brindabella) (5.05): Super briefly, I am rising because we have been expecting the government's second six-monthly update to my motion of 24 June 2025 on—drumroll—Richardson shops. We were expecting this to come back in September at the latest. I hope we have not missed this in the deluge of papers, but I did have some of my best sleuths on the case and none of us can find it. If it is there, I unreservedly apologise. But, if it is not, we would love to get that update, because the community still really want to know what is happening with the shops.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Statements by members
Canberra-Nara Candle Festival

MR BARR (Kurrajong—Chief Minister, Minister for Trade, Investment and the Knowledge Economy, Minister for Tourism and Events, and Minister for Major Projects) (5.06): On Saturday night I had the pleasure of joining tens of thousands of fellow Canberrans at the Nara Peace Park for the annual Canberra Nara Candle Festival. It is one of those special Canberra events that feels both deeply local and proudly international. Families, volunteers, performers and visitors gathered together as thousands of candles illuminated the park and reflected on the many decades of friendship between Canberra and our sister city Nara.

I was very pleased to welcome His Excellency Kazuhiro Suzuki, the Ambassador of

Japan, and a delegation of students from the Nara University High School. Meeting these young people from Japan and seeing them connect with our community is a reminder that the strongest international relationships are built person to person and generation to generation.

This year was particularly significant as Australia and Japan marked 50 years of the treaty of friendship and cooperation, known as the Nara Treaty. While that relationship is of course supported by governments, it is sustained by communities, friendships and cultural exchange, and Canberra and Nara are a wonderful example of that practice.

I would like to thank the Canberra-Nara Sister City Committee, Rotary, the Friends of Nara Park and the many volunteers who make this event possible each year. As we rang the peace bell and joined the lantern procession, it was a reminder that, in this increasingly uncertain world, friendship, understanding and respect between people are values worth celebrating.

Illicit drugs deaths—31st Annual Remembrance Ceremony

MS VASSAROTTI (Kurrajong) (5.07): I rise to recognise the 31st Annual Remembrance Ceremony for those who have lost their lives to illicit drugs, which was held yesterday. I was joined by a number of members of the Assembly, including the Minister for Health, Minister Pettersson and Mr Cain. This ceremony was incredibly moving and important. It was important to hear the names of people who are deeply missed, were loved and made a real difference in people's lives.

Thank you to ATODA, CAHMA, Directions and Uniting New South Wales/ACT, and a particular thank you also to Marian McConnell and Bill Bush, formerly from the Families and Friends of Drug Law Reform, who established this event many years ago. We grieve with you, we care with you and we commit to work to addressing drug use as a health issue and reducing stigma.

Veterans Support Centre Belconnen—theft and vandalism

MR CAIN (Ginninderra) (5.08): It was very distressing to hear the news that over the weekend the Veterans Support Centre Belconnen, located at Page, had been broken into and vandalised and items of property stolen. The damage to the place was unnecessary if you were just wanting to steal something. I visited the site yesterday afternoon and had a tour with Ward Gainey, who is the president of the centre, and also spoke with Treasurer Greg Peters to get an understanding of their needs.

Going there, the security is actually quite robust, including cameras. The thieves had to cut a barbed wire fence over a bent wire that was quite high up to get in. So there was quite an effort made. I would like to encourage—and I have said this through my social media—members and anyone who can hear this short presentation, to consider support and making a donation to the Veterans Shed at Page. They have their own Facebook page. "The Veterans Support Centre Belconnen" is its title. Their number is 62551599 if you would like to call to make a donation.

National War Widows Day

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) (5.10): I rise to recognise National War Widows Day, which was held on 19 October. This national day recognises the strength, resilience and contribution of war widows and widowers and acknowledges the profound impact that military service has on families.

The day coincides with the birthday of Mrs Jessie Vasey, founder of the War Widows Guild of Australia 81 years ago, this year. This date was chosen to recognise her extraordinary leadership and tireless advocacy for the rights and wellbeing of war widows across the country. I particularly wanted to acknowledge and thank the Australian War Widows ACT branch for its ongoing commitment to supporting war widows across the ACT. Through practical assistance, social connection, friendship and representation, the organisation continues to make a meaningful difference in the lives of many Canberrans.

To mark National War Widows Day this year, War Widows ACT, with support from the ACT government and the Canberra Services Club, held a commemorative lunch at the Yowani Country Club. The event honoured war widows and widowers and provided an opportunity for connection, reflection and recognition. I wish to extend my thanks to the community organisations across the ACT that support veterans and their families. Their work helps ensure that veterans remain connected, valued and supported within our community.

Business—interstate relocations

MR PARTON (Brindabella—Leader of the Opposition) (5.11): I want to reflect on some comments that Mr Pettersson made in question time today. He said in response to a question from Ms Castley that the ACT is a fantastic place to do business. He said we are doing a good job here in the ACT of supporting businesses to start up and grow. I was contacted by a Canberra small business owner today who is quite distressed. He actually shared with me an Angus Taylor social media post with a video from a small business round table and he said:

> I can say I am becoming emotionally stressed, ill and tired. It is unfathomable what is happening to small business. Everything they say in this Angus Taylor post is 100 per cent true and relatable for every small business owner.

He went on to say, and I am quoting him indirectly: "Albo, Jim and Katy, they have destroyed this country." He then said:

> And you throw in a broken Barr government, a tram that has destroyed the city and no recognition behind it, and us small business owners to still wear the brunt and cost of it.

He indicated to me that he is trying his best to move out of the territory, and said:

> I have fought for 10 years through COVID and this is where it is at. It makes me upset on levels I have never felt before.

It certainly does not line up with the statement from the business minister,

Mr Pettersson, that the ACT is a fantastic place to do business.

Discussion concluded.

Adjournment

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

> That the Assembly do now adjourn.

Economy—global economics

MR CAIN (Ginninderra) (5.13): I wish to read a speech from a Year 11 student of Lake Ginninderra College who was in my office earlier this month for a week of work experience. He name is Mishan Sun, originally from China, who studies at Lake Ginninderra College, as I mentioned. The theme of her speech is "The current landscape of global economic and political trade-offs from a cross-cultural macro perspective". These are the words of Mishan:

> As an economics student and a fund trader, I make it a habit to follow economic and political news. Real data is the key to demonstrating changes. With issues arising in these areas for 25/26, the global situation is not merely a case of, "Which country is struggling?" Rather, the entire policy landscape has shifted. My profound takeaway from gaining work experience at the Legislative Assembly is that, while parliamentary discussions often centre on local issues, they are driven by underlying global macroeconomic factors and changes. For those of us living in Australia it has become apparent recently that inflation is quite wired and banks have raised interest rates.
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> First, the global economy has shifted from recovery to a phase of slow growth and divergence. The latest IMF projections place global growth for 2026 at approximately 3 to 3.1 per cent, below the average seen in the early part of this century, demonstrating that, while resilience remains, the growth momentum has weakened. Next consider the issue of divergence. Growth stands at approximately 2.3 per cent for the US and around 4.5 per cent for China.
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> The Euro continues to weaken, while growth forecasts for the Middle East and Central Asia have been sharply downgraded due to conflicts. These trends stem from declining political growth rates and divergences in total factor productivity. Meanwhile domestic inflation, social welfare and industrial subsidies in Australia are all influenced by these global macroeconomic factors. Economic divergence is driving nations to prioritise self-preservation, yet this takes two forms: one defensive, energy security; and the other offensive, betting on the AI industry. These two approaches are reshaping global policy priorities.
>
> The second shock stems from energy, geopolitics and AI investment. If the Middle East conflict persist, global growth could drop to 2.5 per cent, while inflation rebounds above 5 per cent, a scenario that would hit energy importing and low income nations the hardest. Meanwhile, private investment in AI could exceed $2 trillion by 2026, boosting USGDP by approximately 0.5 percentage points.
>
> We are thus facing a dichotomy, a supply side risk of stagnation on the one hand and an opportunity for capital deepening and productivity gains on the other, albeit

> accompanied by risks related to market concentration and an AI bubble.
>
> In the Legislative Assembly I have proposed bills addressing AI and energy policy. Essentially, these serve as forms of insurance against these two shocks. Overall, global divergence and the IMF's downward revisions are forcing Australia to adjust, and the pressure felt in Canberra is more immediate than one might imagine. My three-policy proposal, covering energy, AI and talent, is essentially about purchasing an insurance policy for local economic resilience in an era of low growth. That concludes the economic section.
>
> Finally, I am deeply grateful to Mr Cain and his team for their assistance and for welcoming me. You were all incredibly friendly and engaging. Through this genuine work experience I gained insight into the internal workings of the legislature and learned to view politics through the analytical lens of drafting proposals, a process that demands great rigor. The environment here was comfortable and highly educational. I believe this experience will help me reflect on and advance my future career development. I am truly happy and thankful.

They were the words of Mishan Sun, a Year 11 student from Lake Ginninderra College who completed work experience in my office earlier this month.

Waste—Materials recovery facility construction

MS CLAY (Ginninderra) (5.18): The ACT Greens welcome the start of construction of Canberra's new materials recovery facility, but it is years late and it will not give us the recycling that everyday Canberrans need. So far, it will not be recycling soft plastics like bread bags, chip packets and food wrappers. This is an ongoing reminder that the Labor government, at both federal and ACT levels, are letting Canberrans down on recycling.

Plastic pollution is one of the biggest environmental challenges facing human health and the planet. Australia is not winning the war on waste. Plastic continues to pollute our bodies, our oceans and our environment. It is not just an environmental problem; it is a social problem. Wealthier communities can often insulate themselves from environmental degradation, but poorer communities cannot. When waterways are polluted, parks and public spaces deteriorate or waste management costs increase, it is low-income households that feel the impacts first and hardest.

In the past decade, the Greens have initiated and chaired three Senate inquiries to interrogate this critical matter. We are beyond frustrated at the lack of government action. Make the producers who are profiting from this responsible for the mess they create. Make them design their products differently so they create less waste in the first place and make them pay for recycling. The industry itself has called for regulation. The only blocker is government refusing to do their job. Government failed to make the corporations responsible for dealing with their packaging waste. The cost of that waste does not disappear. It is passed on to ratepayers, taxpayers and households. Every dollar that governments spend cleaning up packaging is a dollar not spent on housing, health care, schools or public transport.

We need mandatory product stewardship for packaging. It has been under discussion for decades. State and territory governments called for it and we all agreed to work on it. Environmental groups called for it and the industry called for it. Federal Labor

promised this term that they would bring in mandatory product stewardship for packaging. They made that promise in 2023, but they did not bring forward any laws. Because Labor was moving so slowly, the federal Greens introduced the Extended Producer Responsibility Scheme for Packaging (No Time to Waste) Bill in May this year. The Greens bill went to a committee and, disappointingly, the committee recommended in August that it not be passed. The committee report noted:

> … the Australian Government is already progressing comprehensive packaging reform through consultation with industry, product stewardship organisations and state and territory governments. The committee considers that this process provides the opportunity to develop a nationally consistent framework that is informed by stakeholder consultation and the consideration of implementation, governance and compliance arrangements.

That is great. The federal Labor government did not need the Greens bill because they were doing their own. Just one month later, in September, the Labor government quietly shelved that promise and abandoned their laws. They promised reform for more than a decade and now they have said that they will not bring forward national packaging laws. So that leaves us here in the ACT to pick up the pieces, and those pieces are expensive.

The old Canberra recycling facility burnt down in 2022. Since then, we have been spending over $10 million each year to ship our recycling interstate. We are getting worse results. We are only recycling 38 per cent of household waste, whereas a few years ago we were recycling 79 per cent. The new facility will cost the ACT and federal government $26 million. Veolia has told us that the new facility is worth over $800 million in contract costs and value. We need that facility, but it is expensive. It is running late. It was originally announced to be operating in 2023, then 2026, and now 2028, and it will not be recycling a lot of standard packaging like soft plastics.

Every time over the last many years that I have asked why it will not be recycling soft plastics and other standard items, I was told by the minister or the directorate, "Don't worry about that. Mandatory national schemes are coming and will take care of it." There is no national scheme. Federal Labor has said there will not be a national scheme. Canberrans were let down by federal Labor, who abandoned their promise to make national rules to make big corporations pay for the pollution they make. Canberrans have been let down by ACT Labor, who are building a recycling plant that will not recover standard packaging like soft plastics. Some households can afford to pay for private collection. There are some available, like ReSmart. Some households can afford the extra time to go to a drop-off place or find a soft plastic private recycling service, but no household will get this in the yellow-topped household bin. Please just make polluters pay and give us a system that works.

Youth—Raise Our Voice in Parliament

MS CARRICK (Murrumbidgee) (5.23): This speech was written by a young person from my electorate as part the Raise Our Voice in Parliament campaign. The speech reads:

> Hi, I'm Hajar and I'm 12 years old. It just bothers me when I'm hanging with my friends and we just have absolutely nothing to do and everything turns boring, and one thing most of my friends love as a hobby, sport and activity to do is

> VOLLEYBALL. Especially with nets since that would start actual rallies and plays, plus it's much enjoyable playing seriously.
>
> So my speech is here today so that my dream could happen and I could eventually start playing volleyball with people whenever. If this does happen it would not only benefit me but other people since they could interact with each other and also find a new passion for a sport. Volleyball doesn't also help bring enjoyment and dopamine but as well as strength and makes us use tactical thinking.
>
> So what I want for our electorate to do is help fund volleyball nets that are accessible for anyone, and I'm not talking about 1 singular net, an adjustable one. Obviously, we would have to contribute to bringing our own volleyball. Because if basketball courts can exist, why can't Volleyball nets as well.

Thank you for your advocacy, Hajar. I feel your pain, and hopefully one day the government will invest in our community infrastructure.

Waste—Materials recovery facility construction

MS CHEYNE (Ginninderra—Manager of Government Business, Attorney-General, Minister for City and Government Services, and Minister for Transport) (5.24): I thank Ms Clay for her welcome of the materials recovery facility. I acknowledge that it has been some time in the making, but I think that her frustration about repeating herself is only surpassed by my frustration about repeating myself in response. Here we go again.

The reasons that the MRF was delayed are well-understood, particularly because we were not replacing a facility with a like-for-like facility. We now have a facility on the way that is going to be delivered within 18 months. It has been subject to significant environmental approvals and is going to adopt some of the latest and greatest technology that is available to it.

I am frustrated to hear Ms Clay say that both levels of Labor governments are letting the community down when it comes to soft plastics. I can explain why. Soft plastics are a problematic waste stream. They are among the most technically and environmentally difficult packaging materials to recover. Our facility will not process soft plastics at this stage. However, the contract with Veolia—and the CEO confirmed this with me yesterday—means that they can respond innovatively where the technology allows, but we are not at that point.

Soft plastics are so difficult because they cannot go through the same machinery that other products can. Bags, film and wrappers can wrap around the sorting equipment, interrupt processing and contaminate other materials, so they need specialised processes. Okay, let's build the processes. Well, even then, soft plastics are lightweight but bulky, they are frequently contaminated by food and other substances, and they are commonly made from multiple polymers or laminated layers that cannot be easily separated. That complicates the sorting, it increases transport and processing requirements, and it significantly restricts the markets available for the recovered material.

Recycling is a public service, but calling anything recyclable does not automatically deliver a good environmental or economic result. To create a functioning recycling service, the facility needs a dependable supply and a dependable destination. At the

moment, there are too many unknowns for it to make sense for us in the ACT. Current soft plastics recovery is highly energy and transport intensive. There is the collection, the consolidation, the storing and the transport, sometimes over considerable distances before processing can even begin. And there really is no stable end market, at least for us, and environmental costs might be incurred without achieving a durable recycling outcome.

Some soft plastics can be mechanically recycled and others can be chemically recycled, but that is through pyrolysis. Pyrolysis is heating plastic and burning it to temperatures commonly between 300 and 900 degrees Celsius to produce oil, gas and char. Where plastic is converted into fuel and subsequently burned, that is really not the same circular outcome as turning it back into equivalent packaging. These technologies have a place, but—as I think you would be as well, Mr Speaker—I am not sure they are going to have a very welcome place in the ACT.

It is not a secret that the ACT would have preferred fast national reform, but it is not the same as abandoning soft plastics recycling. All governments re-affirmed in September that packaging reform remains a priority and agreed to continue to work on strengthening the packaging regulatory framework. Recycling has a role, but it cannot carry the whole burden of packaging choices made further up the supply chain. Where packaging is needed, producers should make it easier to re-use or recycle and develop demand for recovered material by using it in new products, and producers have started to step up. I will not say that this is the same as being able to pop something in your recycling bin, but Woolworths stores, as part of the industry, are really trying to step up. They are taking soft plastics again. I understand that they have been able to process all of the amount that REDcycle had stockpiled and they are able to process more. But we also need to make sure that—and this is where Ms Clay and I agree—it is making them pay.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

The Assembly adjourned at 5.30 pm.

Schedules of amendments

Schedule 1

Firearms (Firearm Prohibition Orders) Amendment Bill 2026

Amendments moved by the Minister for Police, Fire and Emergency Services

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1
Clause 14
Proposed new section 183G (3) and (4)
Page 11, line 19—

omit proposed new section 183G (3) and (4), substitute

(3) The respondent must serve a copy of the notice of response on the chief police officer not later than 5 days before the day of the hearing of the application.

(4) The respondent does not waive any right of objection the respondent may have in relation to the application only because the respondent—

(a) does not file a notice of response; or

(b) fails to serve a copy of the notice of response in accordance with subsection (3).

2
Clause 14
Proposed new division 12A.12 heading
Page 52, line 1—

omit the heading, substitute

Division 12A.12 Reporting to Minister and ombudsman

3
Clause 14
Proposed new section 183ZZN
Page 53, line 1—

omit proposed new section 183ZZN, substitute

183ZZN Report to ombudsman

(1) The chief police officer must, within 28 days after the end of a reporting period, give a written report to the ombudsman setting out the following in relation to the reporting period:

(a) the number of firearm prohibition orders made;

(b) the number of firearm prohibition orders amended;

(c) the number of firearm prohibition orders varied;

(d) the number of firearm prohibition orders revoked;

(e) the number of times a power under division 12A.10 (Enforcement) was exercised and the number of times each power was exercised;

(f) the number of things seized during the exercise of a power under division 12A.10;

(g) the number of firearms and firearm-related items seized during the exercise of a power under division 12A.10;

(h) the number of charges laid for offences against this Act connected with searches conducted under division 12A.10;

(i) the number of charges laid for any other offences connected with searches conducted under division 12A.10.

(2) For subsection (1)—

(a) the first reporting period is the period beginning on the day this section commences and ending on the earliest of the following days to occur after that day:

(i) 31 March;

(ii) 30 June;

(iii) 30 September;

(iv) 31 December; and

(b) otherwise—the definition in subsection (4) applies.

(3) Subsection (2) and this subsection expire 1 year after the day they commence.

(4) In this section:

reporting period means a period of 3 months beginning on 1 January, 1 April, 1 July or 1 October in any year.

4
Clause 14
Proposed new section 183ZZO
Page 53, line 17—

omit

5
Clause 14
Proposed new section 183ZZR (1A)
Page 55, line 17—

insert

(1A) In undertaking the review, the Minister must consult with the ombudsman in relation to the operation of section 183ZZN (Report to ombudsman).

Schedule 2

Firearms (Firearm Prohibition Orders) Amendment Bill 2026

Amendments moved by Ms Vassarotti

1
Clause 14
Proposed new section 183ZW (2)
Page 37, line 20—

omit

satisfied exercising the power is reasonably required to determine

substitute

they suspect on reasonable grounds

2
Clause 14
Proposed new section 183ZZ (2), note
Page 42, line 3—

omit

consider that the exercise of power is reasonably required to determine

substitute

suspect on reasonable grounds

3
Clause 14
Proposed new section 183ZZK (2) (a)
Page 50, line 19—

omit

deciding the exercise of the power was reasonably required to determine

substitute

suspecting on reasonable grounds

4
Clause 14
Proposed new section 183ZZK (2) (b)
Page 50, line 23—

omit

when making their decision
