



QUESTION TIME
OF THE
LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
FOR THE
AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

HANSARD

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Wednesday, 23 June 2021

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Questions without notice

Education—staff welfare

MS LEE: My question is to the minister for education. The *Canberra Times* on 20 June quoted from a budget submission to the ACT government from the ACT branch of the Australian Education Union, AEU. In the submission, it is claimed that the high level of workplace injuries of teachers and other staff in government schools caused by chronic staff shortages and infrastructure problems has led to poor student behaviour, including occupational violence. The AEU is asking you to provide data on the severity of the government teacher shortage in the ACT. Minister, is the AEU correct when it says that ACT government schools have chronic staff shortages?

MS BERRY: No, I am not advised that that is the case. However, I will acknowledge that there is a teaching shortage across the country and Canberra has not been immune to that. There is a need to recruit more teachers here in the ACT but also across the whole country. The ACT government, through the Education Directorate and working with the Australian Education Union, is working on a strategy about how we ensure that teachers want to work in government schools here in the ACT. Part of that work is acknowledging that there are great industrial arrangements here in the ACT, and teachers in the ACT remain the highest paid in the country. In addition to that, changes to teacher employment in the ACT are lower. It is not a five-year turnover in teaching in the ACT as it is in the country; we have a much better attrition rate here in the ACT.

But we do need to do some more work. That is why we are working closely with the Australian Education Union to ensure that our teaching profession chooses ACT government schools.

MS LEE: Minister, is the AEU correct when it says that staff shortages lead to poor student behaviour, including occupational violence?

MS BERRY: I think you would have to consider the context of the comments that the Australian Education Union is making. Of course, staff shortages would make a difference to student behaviour in schools. That is why the ACT government works closely with the Australian Education Union to ensure that we have a strategy in place that recruits teachers here in the ACT, respects and values the work that they do, and supports them when they work in ACT government schools, and we maintain that they remain the highest paid in the country, and Canberra public schools are a great place to work.

MR HANSON: Minister, on notice—or now if you have it available—will you provide to the AEU and the Assembly the data that shows the extent of staff shortages across ACT government schools?

MS BERRY: That is not the question that the AEU has asked for advice on, but I am working with the Education Directorate to ensure that we can get that detail for the Education Union.

Education—Margaret Hendry School

MRS JONES: My question is to the minister for education. Minister, the *Canberra Times* reported on Saturday, 29 May that there were serious concerns about education results expressed by some parents of students at Margaret Hendry School. In response to these concerns the Education Directorate wrote that the school would be “deepening its approach to literacy and reading”. The directorate also said that it has already “engaged an instructional mentor”. Minister, what precisely does “deepening its approach to literacy and reading” mean?

MS BERRY: Part of that approach is the Education Directorate and the network student engagement team working closely with the school to understand properly where the improvements need to be made and then working with the teaching professionals at that school. The teaching professionals do a four-year degree to understand and make judgements about how they do their work. My job is about supporting teachers within those school communities to be able to deliver really great pedagogy, after a four-year degree, not to dictate to them how they do that. They get professional support from the network student engagement team and from other experts in delivering literacy and numeracy, to ensure that those schoolteachers get the best possible support to deliver on the ground, and that they use the most up-to-date methods to do that.

MRS JONES: Minister, when was the instructional mentor engaged at Margaret Hendry School, and for how many hours per week is that role on site at the school?

MS BERRY: I would have to take that on notice. As I said, I am not there to dictate how the work occurs. I am there to support teachers to ensure that they can deliver on the ground.

MR HANSON: Minister, what is the role of an instructional mentor? Do other schools across the ACT have them, and to what extent?

MS BERRY: The ACT government has used literacy experts in ACT government schools in delivering the early literacy program across a number of our schools, using literacy expert Christine Topfer. She has been assisting schoolteachers to be able to deliver literacy in a different way, using up-to-date methods to ensure that all of the different pedagogy and styles of up-to-date teaching methods are delivered across our schools. I can absolutely assure Mr Hanson that other schools do have teaching mentors, because, like any other profession, the teaching profession use those mentors and that expertise to ensure that they are kept up to date with all of the most modern teaching methods.

Education—Margaret Hendry School

MR HANSON: My question is to the minister for education. A recent article in the *Canberra Times* on 29 May reported that a meeting of 40 parents of students at Margaret Hendry School had discussed the level of bullying at the school. Some parents were reported to be removing their children from the school in response. The article also reported regular suspensions of children from the school. Minister, what are the issues with bullying at the Margaret Hendry School?

MS BERRY: I thank Mr Hanson for the question, although I must say I am disappointed at the Canberra Liberals’ continuous targeting of one public school in the

ACT. Every single public school is affected by this conversation of dragging out some of the issues that are being experienced—

Mr Hanson: On a point of order, Madam Speaker, I asked a pretty straightforward question about what is the bullying at Margaret Hendry School. The minister is now debating the issue and, in accordance with standing order 118(b), I would ask you to ask her to answer the question directly.

MADAM SPEAKER: I think your point of order came quite early in the answer, but I will ask the minister to go to the question.

Mr Hanson: Well, she is debating it; so it does not matter how soon I ask.

MADAM SPEAKER: Thank you. Ms Berry.

MS BERRY: This school is a diverse and vibrant school community, with over 48 language groups. There are also a variety and a diverse range of students who attend that school. I am not about to go into the detail of the incidents in a school. I have been on the record to suggest that I would not be going into that kind of detail in this place. I think it is deeply unfair to do that and to target one individual school, because when you target one individual public school in the ACT, you target every single one.

I have absolute confidence in the teachers in ACT public schools that they will deliver—as professionals, with their four-year degrees and, in some cases, masters degrees—and that they will act on a continuous range of improvement measures, which Margaret Hendry is absolutely committed to doing and is doing, just like every other public school in the ACT.

MR HANSON: A supplementary, Madam Speaker.

MADAM SPEAKER: Mr Hanson.

MR HANSON: Minister, are you saying that the parents of children at Margaret Hendry School are wrong when they express concerns about the level of student suspensions at the school?

MS BERRY: I am very happy that school parents in any school can raise those issues with their school and that they can be addressed by their school communities, not debated by politicians in this place.

MR MILLIGAN: Minister, does Margaret Hendry School have a higher than average level of student suspensions?

MS BERRY: No, I do not believe so.

Education—teachers

MR DAVIS: My question is to the Minister for Education and relates to teacher attrition. Minister, as you have pointed out in this place previously, the ACT does have a lower than average rate of teacher retention. What are we doing to ensure that we

retain great teachers, and are we conducting exit interviews with each and every teacher before they leave the system?

MS BERRY: It is always very important to understand how many teachers are leaving our schools and why they are making those decisions. Public schools conduct exit interviews and surveys to make sure that we collect that information on the experiences of all staff within our public schools, because that feeds into the continuous efforts to make sure our workplaces are good workplaces. We are committed to making sure that they continue to be good workplaces.

MR DAVIS: Minister, specifically, do we interview every single teacher when they resign from the directorate to identify why they have left teaching?

MS BERRY: We cannot compel teachers who are leaving the profession to participate in a survey. But my understanding is that those exit interviews do occur and that that information is valuable to ensuring the Education Directorate works closely with its workforce and with the Australian Education Union to make sure these workplaces meet the needs of teaching professionals.

MS CLAY: Can you outline the steps the government and directorate take to re-engage teachers once they have left the profession?

MS BERRY: I will have to take that on notice. That is not a job that I do specifically. I have to check what the Education Directorate does. I will take that on notice and bring that advice back to the Assembly, if it's available.

Schools—employment

DR PATERSON: My question is to the minister for education. Minister, how are public schools providing jobs for Canberrans?

MS BERRY: I thank Dr Paterson for her question. ACT public schools are growing and we are hiring more and more Canberrans to staff our public schools. In this term of government we are committed to hiring more than 400 teachers to support staff in our ACT public schools. This commitment provides universities with the confidence to enrol more students and provides prospective teachers with the confidence to commit to a career of teaching in the ACT.

The ACT government has also committed to hiring 25 teacher librarians and 25 youth and social workers by the end of the term of government. We know that teacher librarians support literacy in schools by working directly with students, providing specialist advice to teachers, and fostering a love for learning and school communities. To achieve this increase in qualified teacher librarians, we are providing 10 scholarships each year to teachers to complete the required master's degree. The additional youth and social workers will add to the existing team of wellbeing experts and allied health professionals working across public schools.

The government's significant investment in school infrastructure will also support approximately 1,200 jobs across the territory, with a strong pipeline of work in the coming years.

DR PATERSON: Minister, why are public schools such a great place to work?

MS BERRY: As we have just been talking about, there is a nation-wide teacher shortage, which is why it is so important to ensure that ACT public schools are great places to work. The ACT government is committed to attracting and nurturing a workforce of teachers who do the important work of educating the next generation. I am proud of ACT public school teachers and of the fact that they are the highest paid in the country, with strong conditions backed by the effectiveness of their union, the ACT branch of the Australian Education Union.

The ACT government is committed to ensuring that government jobs are safe and secure. Since 2019, the government has converted more than 500 public school teachers from temporary to permanent employment, giving those people more certainty in their future. Like the rest of the country, ACT education does face workforce challenges. I am committed to continuing to work with teachers through their union to keep improving the working lives of our teachers and all our school staff.

MR DAVIS: Minister, what does the directorate do when a teacher resigns from teaching because they have self-identified that for them teaching has not been a fulfilling profession?

MS BERRY: I will have to take that question on notice, but as I said in previous answers to questions, the Education Directorate does conduct exit surveys with the teachers who leave our system. Of course, they cannot be compelled—it is not compulsory—but we do our best to understand and ensure that our workplaces are great workplaces, and we work with the Australian Education Union to ensure that they continue to be great workplaces.

Housing ACT—maintenance

MR PARTON: My question is to the Minister for Housing and Suburban Development. Minister, in answer to a question on notice, you stated that, for houses which have problems with mice, rats and/or maggots, for this financial year, 539 pest and vermin control activities have been undertaken. Tenants are only eligible for these activities within the first three months of a new tenancy or if an infestation becomes horrific. Based on those numbers, up to one in 20 public housing properties have pest and vermin infestations. There are many regular reports of rats, mice and/or maggots which have not been dealt with and are getting into neighbouring properties. Minister, why do infestations continue, given their risk to the health and safety of public housing tenants?

MS BERRY: I recall that answer that I provided to you, Mr Parton. What you are referring to is the number of jobs that were required, not the actual number of particular pests or vermin in public housing properties in the ACT. Public housing properties in the ACT, like every other house in the ACT, are experiencing a greater number, it appears, of rats and mice visiting. Nobody wants them; they are unwanted visitors, and they need to be addressed by all of us.

In public housing, Housing ACT takes those concerns very seriously. Where supports are needed to alleviate those issues within public housing properties then they are met.

But you are reading the answer to the question incorrectly. It is the job numbers, not the identification of the particular pests, vermin or other issues that were addressed in those properties.

MR PARTON: Minister, given that some of these problems have been ongoing for years, what steps occur after a pest control visit occurs, and what precisely is the follow-up?

MS BERRY: I will have to take the detail of that question on notice and provide a general response on what happens—unless Mr Parton has a specific matter that he wants to refer to my office; I can follow that up as well. It would be in the householder's interest, if there were issues still occurring in the space after a period of time, to then get back in contact with Housing ACT to ensure that the matter is resolved. In the first instance, I will try and get some general information about what occurs, but if Mr Parton has a particular issue that he wants me to follow up, he can get in touch with my office.

MS LEE: Minister, what steps will you take to fix these ongoing problems, given that tenants have reported these problems for years?

MS BERRY: As I said I will provide some general advice to the Assembly about what occurs in those circumstances, generally, as far as the management of those kinds of issues in public housing properties. If Ms Lee has a particular circumstance that she wants to raise with my office, then I can definitely get that addressed for her.

Housing—homelessness

MR MILLIGAN: My question is to the Minister for Housing and Suburban Development. There are around 400 public housing properties sitting empty. Since the February 2021 update of 191 rough sleepers, what is the current number of Canberrans who are homeless and sleeping rough?

MS VASSAROTTI: I thank Mr Milligan for the question. The issue of rough sleepers is one we are really conscious of, particularly at this time of the year, as the weather gets colder. Everyone in this place is distressed at the fact that we see rough sleepers in Canberra, and on a daily basis we have the Street to Home program from Vinnies that supports people sleeping rough.

In terms of the numbers of people, I have numbers as of 31 May 2021. We know that Street to Home was supporting 99 people. Twelve of those clients were accommodated and they were receiving case management, so they were not sleeping rough at that point in time. Twenty-three clients were receiving case management, so they may or may not have had accommodation, and 64 clients were receiving outreach support—so, we know they are sleeping rough but we do not have an understanding about whether they have accommodation. We know that 51 of those were from Canberra, 6 were from New South Wales, one was from Victoria, two from were Queensland, two were from South Australia, one was from New Zealand and was one unknown.

In addition, I have some information about clients that Onelink have been working with. As of 7 June 2021, Onelink are currently supporting 10 individuals who we know are sleeping rough either in a tent, garage or outdoors, including a man and one couple that

were (*Time expired.*)

MR MILLIGAN: Minister, is the 99 number that you have just stated comparable to the 191 from the February update?

MS VASSAROTTI: I thank Mr Milligan for the question. We are doing quite a bit of work in terms of understanding the data on exact numbers of people and whether we are double counting some numbers. We know a number of people are getting services from a range of different organisations, which is fantastic. I will take the specific question on notice in terms of the comparison of what was counted in the February update and the numbers I gave today.

MR PARTON: Minister, is the government supportive of the Sleepbus scheme which has just commenced in the ACT?

MS VASSAROTTI: I thank Mr Parton for the question. We are seeing across the community a range of responses to homelessness in this city. Certainly the ACT government provides a range of support to specialist homelessness organisations—more than \$25 million for specific and systemic responses. We also see a range of other services provided by a range of organisations that are self-funded and not reliant on funding from the ACT government—

Mr Hanson: Madam Speaker, on a point of order as to relevance, the question was specifically about whether the government supports Sleepbus, not a range of other services. I ask that the minister be directly relevant.

MADAM SPEAKER: I think she is being relevant. She is referring to services that the government does support, and she has a minute left to answer.

MS VASSAROTTI: I was just getting to the fact that a range of services are provided by organisations when they see that there is a need in the community. The Sleepbus initiative is one that the ACT government has not been approached to support. We encourage a range of organisations to respond, but we do not have a specific position on the Sleepbus. We do encourage organisations to respond and to connect with the rest of the homelessness sector.

Building—licensing scheme

MR PETTERSSON: My question is to the Minister for Sustainable Building and Construction. Minister, thank you for your previous answer on the status of the development of a property developer licensing scheme, including scoping work and discussions with industry stakeholders. Can you please provide a further update on where that work is up to, with specific reference to time frames you are working to, so that developers, construction workers and buyers can have greater confidence in the sector?

MS VASSAROTTI: I thank Mr Pettersson for the question. Yes, I can give an update in terms of the specifics of some of the work we have been doing and what the time frames are in terms of moving forward. As I noted when we spoke about this in the Assembly previously, I know that EPSDD had undertaken some initial policy and

regulatory analysis and worked out some of the key issues that will need to be further considered and resolved.

As part of this, we know that we need to do work with industry stakeholders to address some of these key issues, such as what definitions we are working to, some of the complex legal and corporate structures that we need to look at, as well as any new laws that we need to be more effective. Due to this, we are currently working on engaging a consultant to assist, particularly with working through some of these issues, as well as some of the stakeholder engagement.

In terms of the time frames and anticipated staging for the development of the scheme, in the third and fourth quarter this year, we will be engaging a consultant. We will be doing some of the further policy and regulatory analysis, as well as some specifically targeted consultation. In the first and second quarter of 2022, we will work on a legislative model, and we will be presenting that to government for consideration, with further consultation with stakeholders around some of the key implementation matters, as well as drafting the legislation. We would expect that in the third to fourth quarter of 2022 we will introduce legislation and pass it and for the new provisions to commence.

MR PETTERSSON: Minister, could you please expand on what the key issues are that you are trying to address with the property developer licensing scheme?

MS VASSAROTTI: I thank Mr Pettersson for the question. The key thing that we are really trying to look at in terms of property developer licensing is around ensuring that there is appropriate accountability and there is visibility in terms of who consumers are dealing with when they are entering into some of the biggest investments in their lives. We have seen some key issues around building quality, and a significant amount of work has occurred in terms of improving the regulatory system. But we do know that there is more work to be done, so we would see property developer licensing as a key element of this.

We need to understand what it means when we talk about a property developer, which is why the issue of definition is really important. We need to understand how we can do appropriate accountability, particularly when we see some of the complex corporate structures that sit behind some of these arrangements. We also need a mechanism to deal with things when things go wrong. Some of the work that has already occurred, particularly around security of payment systems, has been a really good step forward; we get very strong feedback that these are working well. But there is still some work in terms of ensuring that that accountability is there, and that consumers know who they are dealing with when they are entering into these contracts.

MS ORR: Minister, when you say accountability measures what are you focusing on, and how will the scheme provide accountability regarding developers?

MS VASSAROTTI: One of the issues with coming into a project that is quite complex is that we need to do that initial analysis and policy development. Some of the questions that Ms Orr has raised are exactly the sorts of questions that we are looking at right now. What does it mean in terms of accountability? It is in terms of visibility, in terms of people understanding who is involved in these projects. It is around understanding what the terms of that are. It is also around what happens when things go wrong—what

some of the issues are, and that there are consequences when things go wrong, in terms of property developers. So concepts such as: are there fit and proper person tests and if something has gone wrong and people have not done what they should have done, what consequences should be considered in terms of people taking that kind of activity and moving forward? These are all questions that we are engaging with stakeholders on. They are the key questions that we think are important relate to accountability issues.

Planning—entertainment precincts

MS CLAY: My question is to the Minister for Planning and Land Management. Minister, it has been 11 years since the planning committee made recommendations about entertainment precincts and other ways to support the live music scene. There have been many reports since, including the Entertainment Action Plan 2019. In August 2020, you told the Assembly that formal engagement and consultation on entertainment areas had been postponed due to the pandemic. While I appreciate that the pandemic is still going on, much of Canberra is opening back up. Can you please update the Assembly on where consultation is up to on the 2019 Entertainment Action Plan?

MR GENTLEMAN: I thank Ms Clay for the question. It is important as we go forward with the action plan to seek to ensure that we get consultation across the ACT community. We are doing that with the consultation on the planning review. The action plan which I released in October 2019 sets out a vision for a dynamic Canberra that offers a diversity of entertainment and night-time activities. As I have mentioned, it focuses on long-term planning rather than providing quick fixes, but we have commenced implementing the first phase of actions. I am pleased to say that the implementation of all 10 actions in the first phase is underway.

MS CLAY: Will that implementation of the Entertainment Action Plan or environmental authorisations ensure that festivals like the National Multicultural Festival will not risk closure if those in newly built hotels and apartments lodge noise complaints?

MR GENTLEMAN: That will be a matter for the EPA at the particular time of looking at the permit, but I can say that we have the first phase underway. We have seven actions now completed, including a case study of a trial entertainment area in the city centre, we have investigated options for soundproofing venues to protect existing activity and consideration of noise levels and noise attenuation requirements in entertainment areas, and a review of noise information available on the Access Canberra website.

MR DAVIS: Minister, as part of phase 1, the plan was to trial a temporary special entertainment area in the city centre. When will that trial go ahead?

MR GENTLEMAN: I thank Mr Davis for the question. As we heard earlier, the trial has been delayed somewhat due to COVID restrictions. As soon as the health officer gives us advice, we will be able to look at that.

Housing ACT—complaints

MRS KIKKERT: My question is to the Minister for Housing and Suburban Development. Minister, the Canberra Liberals constantly receive complaints about

inaction by Housing ACT, Programmed facilities management and your office. We try and speak to all constituents who complain. Minister, how many times this term have you personally visited public housing residents, other than those brought to your attention by the shadow minister for housing and homelessness?

MS BERRY: I would have to check on the number of times that I have visited public housing properties but, as minister, I am regularly visiting to-be-built, post-built or existing public housing properties. I will take on that detail and provide advice to the Assembly.

MRS KIKKERT: Minister, what feedback do you receive from these constituents when you do visit them?

MS BERRY: Very positive feedback. The ACT government is currently going through a significant growth and renewal program in the ACT, which is about making sure that older homes in the ACT are changed and renewed and upgraded to ensure that they are more sustainable and affordable for public housing tenants to move into. They are very happy in their new environment. That is what the whole program is about. By the end of the program, we will have renewed 20 per cent of our public housing property in the ACT so that it better meets the needs of our tenants.

MR PARTON: Minister, what has been done with the feedback that you have received from constituents regarding maintenance? What has been done with that feedback and what changes have been made as a consequence of that feedback?

MS BERRY: I am not sure what feedback you are referring to, Mr Parton. Every time I get correspondence from anybody—whether it is a public housing tenant or members of the opposition or members of my own political party—that is provided to my office, I immediately follow up with Housing ACT and Programmed to ensure that tenants are being appropriately supported with their maintenance or with their housing needs.

Housing ACT—maintenance

MS LAWDER: My question is to the Minister for Housing and Suburban Development. The 2016 Auditor-General's report entitled *Maintenance of Public Housing* revealed Housing ACT did not have sufficient oversight of the previous maintenance contractor Spotless's quality control activities. Since then Programmed facilities management have taken over the contract for maintenance on Housing ACT properties. Given the high number of maintenance complaints it is apparent that the same issues continue to playing public housing residents. Minister, five years on from that Auditor-General's report why is there no significant improvement?

MS BERRY: I think Ms Lawder is referring to the Spotless total facilities management prior to Programmed, who is now doing that contract. There actually have been significant changes in how the contract and how that program is being delivered across Housing ACT properties. It should be acknowledged that Housing ACT manages a portfolio of around 11,700 properties, with a value of over \$5.4 billion as at 30 June 2020. Housing ACT spent \$52 million on repairs and upgrades to its portfolio through the Total Facilities Management provider. This is in excess of 77,000 work orders, including 783 upgrades to properties. Those upgrades include 99 kitchens, 141

bathrooms and laundries, 295 floor coverings and 248 internal and external painting jobs—

Mrs Jones: A point of order, Madam Speaker, on relevance. The question asked was why there has not been an improvement. I understand the minister is giving important information, but by comparison to the previous contractor is the question.

MADAM SPEAKER: Minister, you might be able to get to that point, but I think your response is in order, to date.

MS BERRY: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Of course there are improvements in the project management. That was why we changed the contract from Spotless to Programmed—to ensure we could apply those changes to the system, to ensure that we have a strong and effective governance system within that performance management project. Notwithstanding all of the achievements that we have made, the audit that was done has identified some aspects of management that can be improved. Like any large contract the ACT government holds, we are always committed to making sure we improve, particularly for those people in our community that need that support most.

MS LAWDER: Minister, what improvements have Programmed facilities management made to the day-to-day lives of government housing tenants in the ACT, given we are seeing the number of complaints being received increasing?

MS BERRY: I might take a bit of that question on notice because I can show the differences between the previous contract and the new contract under Programmed and the improvements that were made to the contract to ensure that works did improve, following the Auditor-General's report but also to the change in that contract arrangement.

MRS KIKKERT: Minister, how often do you receive a report on the quality control activities which were such an issue in the previous contract?

MS BERRY: As I said previously, I respond to every single individual who gets in touch with my office about their particular issues and then can follow up with Housing ACT and Programmed about those works for those individual properties and people who live in them. As far as an overall quality control analysis report, I receive those from time to time, but I can take that on notice and provide that information to the chamber.

Housing—homelessness

MR CAIN: My question is to the Minister for Homelessness and Housing Services. Minister, almost 3,000 Canberrans are currently waiting between 300 and 1,300 days for social housing, yet the Greens have promised a “home for all”. One of my constituents was sleeping in a tent on public land. When the minister was alerted, it took over seven weeks to receive a response. Minister, why are hundreds of homeless Canberrans left waiting for years for accommodation?

MS VASSAROTTI: I thank Mr Cain for the question. In relation to the issue of the waiting list, the ACT government recognises that there has been increased demand for

public housing, which is continuing to grow. We have seen the number of priority applicants increasing. This is something that both governing parties have been really focused on. As part of our parliamentary and governing agreement, the commitment to increase the numbers of public housing and improve the situation for people who are homeless is a really significant commitment. It is something that we are continuing to work through, in relation to activities such as the budget announcements in February, when there was a significant injection into homelessness services of \$2.9 million to respond to the issue. So this issue around homelessness is one we work on specifically with our specialist homelessness services, particularly OneLink. Again, OneLink was one of the organisations that received additional funding through the February budget.

In relation to responses that you might be getting from our office, when we get an issue from another member's office, particularly around someone who is in significant need, the focus absolutely is on responding to the individual situation, finding out information and ensuring that, as far as possible, we can provide an immediate response. Sometimes with the correspondence there is a delay in getting back to whoever has made a query on behalf of a constituent, but I can absolutely guarantee to the member that there is an immediate response, as soon as we have the information, to ensure that we are providing any support that we can, certainly through programs such as the Street to Home program. *(Time expired.)*

MR CAIN: Minister, is that increase in demand that you just mentioned more than proportionate to the population growth in the ACT?

MS VASSAROTTI: I thank Mr Cain for the question. We do think there are a number of drivers in relation to the demand for public housing. Certainly, the COVID-19 pandemic—

Mr Parton interjecting—

MADAM SPEAKER: Ignore the interjection, Ms Vassarotti.

MS VASSAROTTI: That is one of the drivers that has seen an increase in demand. We have all seen significant issues around the housing market in the ACT. Like many other places in Australia, we are seeing an increase in house values that is putting significant pressure on the situation. There are a number of drivers—

Mrs Jones: A point of order.

MADAM SPEAKER: Resume your seat.

MS VASSAROTTI: I have pretty well finished answering the question.

MADAM SPEAKER: Your point of order?

Mrs Jones: It goes to relevance. The point was about whether the increase—

MADAM SPEAKER: What is the point of order, Mrs Jones?

Mrs Jones: The point of order is on relevance. The question was: is the increase in

numbers commensurate with the increase in population? It has not been touched on at all yet by the minister.

MADAM SPEAKER: She is certainly within the scope of the response to homelessness services. Ms Vassarotti, you have some time left.

MS VASSAROTTI: What I was trying to explain was that there are other drivers separate to population growth that are driving some of the demand.

Opposition members interjecting—

MADAM SPEAKER: Members, let the minister answer the question.

MS VASSAROTTI: I feel that I have answered the question.

Mrs Jones interjecting—

MADAM SPEAKER: Not helpful, Mrs Jones.

MR PARTON: Minister, given the size of the waiting list, when can Canberrans expect a home for all? Is there a date for delivery of that?

MS VASSAROTTI: I thank Mr Parton for the question. When the ACT Greens went to the election, we absolutely have the aspiration of a decent home for all. We will work with our government partners. This is something on which—I am not going to put a specific date on in relation to this in this Assembly. But we are working to increase the numbers of public housing. We are looking to increase the numbers of affordable housing. There is a vast range of policy initiatives that this government is working on to ensure that everyone does have a decent home. We are getting on with the job. There is still much work to be done, and I will be working every day of this term to ensure that we do all we can to provide a decent home for all.

Housing ACT—maintenance

MS CASTLEY: My question is to the Minister for Housing and Suburban Development. We continue to receive a steady stream of pleas for help from ACT Housing tenants whose maintenance requests are being ignored. The Programmed facilities management contract says that maintenance jobs must be done between one and 20 days from when the request is received by the contractor, depending on the severity of risk to tenants. Unfortunately, this is not what always happens. People are being told by Programmed facilities management that the 20-day time frame begins when the request is approved, not when it is received. Minister, why are these tenants being lied to?

MS BERRY: I do not agree with some of the premise of that question, because of course it has to be from the time the issue is assessed to ensure a time frame for when the matter can be resolved. It has to be. Building contractors have to go out and assess the actual job to find out what is required and then make an assessment on how long it will take and when the job will be done. The suggestion that Programmed contractors, Canberrans who work for Programmed to deliver that work to Housing ACT tenants,

are being dishonest is not an entirely correct comment from the opposition. We have to understand the context within each individual job.

MS CASTLEY: Minister, since the Canberra Liberals raised the issue of Housing ACT's maintenance problems in a motion on 21 April, has anything changed?

MS BERRY: Of course, we want to make sure that public housing properties are maintained and that public housing tenants are supported as much as we possibly can. They are people who do not have the same kinds of chances as everybody else. They do not have the same kinds of opportunities to just run down to Bunnings and fix any issues that they have in their homes.

We are always striving for improvement in the delivery of upgrading public housing properties. So of course any time that my office, that Programmed or that Housing ACT has matters raised, each individual complaint or issue that is raised is investigated and appropriate action is taken to make sure that those issues are resolved.

DR PATERSON: Minister, could you outline some of the goals of the growth and renewal public housing program?

Mrs Jones: Point of order, Madam Speaker. The question was not about the matters that have been raised in the supplementary. They were not even mentioned in the substantial question or the answers to the question.

MADAM SPEAKER: Can you repeat your question, Dr Paterson.

DR PATERSON: Given all the questions on maintenance—

Mr Hanson: That is not what was said, Madam Speaker.

MADAM SPEAKER: Dr Paterson.

DR PATERSON: I would like to hear about the goals of the growth and renewal public housing program.

Mr Rattenbury: On the point of order, Madam Speaker, a question has been asked about maintenance. It is quite plausible that the minister's answer is going to be that that is why there is a significant renewal program. I think the question is entirely relevant.

MADAM SPEAKER: I understand—

Opposition members interjecting—

MADAM SPEAKER: Ms Lee! The response was useful to an extent, Mr Rattenbury. I will allow the question and I will listen intently to the minister's answer.

MS BERRY: The focus of the housing renewal and growth campaign is about upgrading and improving Canberra's ageing public housing stock and, in doing so, supporting the broader renewal of Canberra's city and urban areas.

Municipal services—swimming pools

MR BRADDOCK: My question is to Minister Berry regarding women-only swim times in public pools, and it was written by Nikos of Kaleen High School, who has worked in my office this week. My electorate has a diverse community, which includes women who, due to their ethnic background and/or religious belief, are seeking women-only swim times at pools. A trial was conducted in October last year at the Canberra Olympic Pool, which saw a large uptake. Royal Life Saving ACT has also expressed support for these separate times to allow women from culturally diverse groups to learn and improve their swimming skills. Considering the success of the trial, will the government consider rollout of women-only swim times across Canberra?

MS BERRY: The pilot program that was conducted at Canberra Olympic Pool. Because of the closure, unfortunately, of the Gungahlin pool temporarily while it has repairs on its tiles those users at Gungahlin have been moving to Civic pool, so we have not been able to continue the trial or the program at Civic pool. But it is certainly something we are considering continuing once Gungahlin pool is back online.

We can certainly talk to the management of other pools to see whether there is an opportunity at other pools to roll out a program similar to that, but definitely when the Gungahlin pool is back online the trial is definitely something the ACT government wants to continue at the Civic pool.

MR BRADDOCK: Minister, can you update the Assembly on feedback you have received as a result of the trial from the community?

MS BERRY: It was positive feedback and that the same-gender swimming sessions should continue at the Canberra Olympic Pool. But that occurred during non-peak times. As I said, unfortunately COVID and the Gungahlin pool closing temporarily has meant that we have not been able to continue that program at Civic, but definitely positive feedback, and we want to continue that program once Gungahlin pool comes back online.

MS CLAY: Minister, when will you be rolling out this program to all the other electorates, including Belconnen.

MS BERRY: I have not made that commitment. What I have made a commitment to is investigating whether that would be—

Mr Hanson: Madam Speaker, if the minister has not made that statement, I assume the question is seeking an announcement of policy and would be out of order.

MS BERRY: Thank you, Mr Hanson!

Mr Hanson: My pleasure!

MADAM SPEAKER: Is this where I make the comment that the central table is much better behaved than yesterday?

A question, Ms Orr?

Emergency services—government support

MS ORR: My question is to the Minister for Police and Emergency Services. Minister, how is the government supporting police and emergency services?

MR GENTLEMAN: I thank Ms Orr for her support of our frontline service personnel. The ACT government is supporting our police and emergency services by providing significant resources to our frontline responders. We are enabling our frontline responders to keep our community safe through major investments in ACT Policing, ACT Fire & Rescue, ACT Ambulance Service, ACT Rural Fire Service and the ACT State Emergency Service. We are funding more firefighters, police officers and paramedics; providing better equipment and facilities; and continuing to invest in the training, health, wellbeing and safety of our volunteers and staff.

As a result of the government's ongoing support, the ACT has arguably the best-resourced, best-equipped and best-trained emergency services in the country. Thank you to all of our emergency responders for keeping our community safe.

Mr Hanson interjecting—

MR GENTLEMAN: The ACT government, unlike Mr Hanson, will continue to support you, now and into the future.

MS ORR: Minister, has the government recently hired more police and emergency services personnel?

MR GENTLEMAN: The government is hiring more emergency responders to ensure that Canberra remains a safe and well-protected city into the future. We are committed to maintaining a skilled and resilient workforce that is well supported and able to meet the challenging and changing demands of our growing city. In recent years we have made significant investments in staffing, including the recruitment of an additional 99 firefighters over the next five years, as part of the ACT Fire & Rescue enterprise agreement, and over 60 new ACT Policing members over four years, as part of our \$33.9 million commitment to the police service model.

I have had the pleasure of meeting many of our new recruits already, and I look forward to welcoming future frontline responders in the coming years. I wish them all the best in their future careers serving the Canberra community.

DR PATERSON: Minister, how is the government recognising these staff?

MR GENTLEMAN: The government values the contribution of our emergency services personnel and appreciates their distinguished and exemplary service to the ACT community. I want to take this opportunity to congratulate the six members of the ACT Emergency Services Agency and ACT Policing who have been recognised for their outstanding contribution to protecting and serving the Canberra community with the 2021 ACT Community Protection Medal. They are dedicated and passionate people who have each gone above and beyond their normal duties to make our community

safer. I am proud to recognise their achievements and dedication to the Canberra community. I congratulate them on their distinguished and outstanding service. Well done to Leading Senior Constable Nadia Mulino from ACT Policing, Neil Glasgow from ACTAS, Nicholas Rand from ACT SES, Anthony Cross from ACT Rural Fire Service, Col O'Rourke from ACT Fire & Rescue, and Erik Sandin from ACT ESA.

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