



QUESTION TIME

OF THE

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

FOR THE

AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

HANSARD

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Wednesday, 21 October 2026

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Questions without notice

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

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

Ms Stephen-Smith: I raise a point of order, Mr Speaker. The Leader of the Opposition has claimed that I commented on this matter publicly this morning. I want to clarify that I did not make any comment on this matter this morning.

MR SPEAKER: Thank you. Continue on.

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

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

Mr Parton: You're the Chief Minister.

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

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

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

Mr Parton: We were just asking.

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

Mr Cain: Will you take it on notice?

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

MS BARRY: Chief Minister, is Mr Ceramidas being paid by the ACT taxpayer in any

capacity at all beyond just employment within the ACT public service?

MR BARR: Not that I am aware of.

Suburban Land Agency—land release program

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

MR BARR: No; I think demand for houses will be higher than that, but, of course, the government is not the only supplier of land. There are joint ventures. There are englobo releases, and there is land available through private sector developers. And, of course, there are 210,000 dwellings in the ACT that are privately owned.

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

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

Legal actions against the Integrity Commission—taxpayer funded legal fees

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

MS CHEYNE: I will take it on notice.

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

MS CHEYNE: I will take it on notice.

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

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

Extreme weather—heat and smoke refuges

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Certainly the request of the incident controller is something that Libraries ACT stands ready to support.

Public schools—funding

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

There is also an exceptions pool of funding that is available, which Ms Lee is well aware of, that can be used to support any shortfall.

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

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

Ms Lee interjecting—

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

Ms Lee interjecting—

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

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

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

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

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: No; the shadow Treasurer is not correct. We have discussed this process on multiple occasions, and what we have been very clear about is that it is an iterative process. The Education Directorate was aware, when it went out to principals with their preliminary budget, based on their student resource allocation, that they did not hold all the information that schools held and that there would need to be

an iterative process to work through risk assessment, staffing requirements and projected enrolments, recognising that the Education Directorate had an understanding of potential enrolments, but the schools would have further information about how many families had approached them for enrolments in the following year. All of that information is being collated. Yes, there are high-level areas of criteria, and that is being worked through this week. The analysis will be done through the week and next week with principals.

I want to again thank all the principals, school leaders and school communities who have engaged with the Education Directorate, as well as the small group of directorate staff who have been working incredibly hard to ensure that we deliver on our commitment to a fairer and more equitable distribution of funding to our schools—something that this place seemed to agree to when the public school system resourcing review came out, but on which it is now taking a different position.

Public schools—funding

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

Mr Parton interjecting—

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

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

Ms Lee interjecting—

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

Ms Lee interjecting—

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

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

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

Mr Parton interjecting—

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

Ms Lee interjecting—

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

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

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

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

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

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

right?

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

Ms Lee interjecting—

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

Mr Parton interjecting—

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

Commonwealth—Disaster Ready Fund

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

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

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

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

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

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

DR PATERSON: I will take that on notice.

Energy—Energy Efficiency Council ACT scorecard

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

MS ORR: I thank the member for his question. The scorecard found that the ACT is a national leader in energy policy performance, with the most comprehensive energy

efficiency policy framework, including a wide range of incentives, consumer support and regulation.

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

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

The scorecard rates policy settings in three main areas: energy efficiency, electrification and demand flexibility. The ACT was found to be the leading jurisdiction on energy efficiency policy, and the scorecard gave full marks to the ACT's consumer programs, including the Sustainable Home Advice Program and the Home Energy Support Program, which provide tailored advice to households to improve home energy performance, and the Sustainable Household Scheme, the Home Energy Support Program and the Energy Efficiency Improvement Scheme, which support households to adopt efficient electrical appliances and thermal upgrades.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

MS ORR: I thank the member for her question. The ACT's Climate Change Strategy first action plan identifies several new and continuing actions to improve energy efficiency across the ACT economy. We will continue to embed energy efficiency into planning and construction through minimum standards and mandatory disclosures, and

we will review the Energy Efficiency Improvement Scheme to ensure that it continues to provide effectively targeted support to households and businesses that face the greatest barriers to electrification and improving energy efficiency.

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

As I mentioned, the scorecard recommended further work on gas appliance phase-out, and now that the government has concluded consultation on this matter, we will be considering further measures to support the gas transition and the phase-out of fossil fuel gas, which I look forward to everyone in this place supporting.

Access Canberra—Woden—relocation

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

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

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

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

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

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

MS CHEYNE: I will take that on notice.

ACT Health—paediatric services

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

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

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

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

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

DR PATERSON: I will take that on notice.

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

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

Extreme weather events—domestic, family and sexual violence

MISS NUTTALL: My question is to the Minister for the Prevention of Domestic,

Family and Sexual Violence.

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

MS TOUGH: I thank Miss Nuttall for the question. She has raised a really interesting point. I will take the details on notice. It is a really important correlation and potentially a causation to note the difference in how climate change affects the entire community, and one of those aspects is family and domestic violence. I will take the substantive part of the question on notice.

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

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

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

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

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

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

MR SPEAKER: It is a different question. One is about domestic violence; the other is about public health. I think they are questions to different ministers and on different

topics. I do not think that it is in order.

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

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

Crime—offences against the person

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Dr Paterson: Family and domestic violence.

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

DR PATERSON: Family and domestic violence.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Firearms—legislation

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

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

Mr Parton: So there is no evidence at all?

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

Mr Parton: There is no evidence.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Extreme weather events—impacts on renters

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Drugs—roadside testing

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

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

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

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

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

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

ACT Mental Health Month

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

Month this year?

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

World Mental Health Day, observed annually on 10 October, reinforces this principle. This year's theme, Together We Thrive, reflects a simple but powerful truth: connection matters. Whether through family, friends, colleagues, community groups or support services, strong connections are fundamental to good mental health and wellbeing.

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

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

Mr Cocks: Point of order. Preamble.

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

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

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

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

Peer workers draw on these experiences to support others through shared understanding. Sometimes knowing that someone else has been through the same or

similar thing can make a real difference. It can help people feel less alone, build confidence, and see possibilities for their own recovery. That is why the Peer Pathways program is so important. The program strengthens the role of peer workers within Canberra Health Services, bringing the expertise of lived experience.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Justice—parole

MS BARRY: My question is to the Attorney-General. Attorney-General, other

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

MS CHEYNE: I accept the point that Ms Barry is making, that we do need to have a greater level of scrutiny and visibility regarding our Sentence Administration Board. This is something that the new chair of the board and I have been discussing. I will take the detail on notice, as to exactly what is recorded and where it is published. But there is a body of work regarding the modernisation of those procedures, to give effect to the point that Ms Barry is making. She is not incorrect in raising that question.

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

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

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

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

MR SPEAKER: Give me a moment.

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

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

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

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

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

MR SPEAKER: The risk management systems.

MS CHEYNE: I am briefed from time to time about what they are considering and what they are applying. Also, I would refute a suggestion that someone who has served

their time after committing a serious crime necessarily remains a high risk to the community. That is exactly what the Sentence Administration Board exists for: to work through what those risks are and to consider an individual's circumstances and the appropriateness of parole.

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