



DEBATES
OF THE
LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
FOR THE
AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

DAILY HANSARD

Edited proof transcript

19 March 2025

This is an **EDITED PROOF TRANSCRIPT** of proceedings that is subject to further checking. Members' suggested corrections for the official *Weekly Hansard* should be lodged in writing with the Hansard office no later than **Tuesday, 1 April 2025**.

Wednesday, 19 March 2025

Paper	653
Petition:	
Community organisations—Fearless Women—funding—petition 12-25	654
Motion to take note of petition.....	655
Economy—snapshot of ACT economy in 2025 (Ministerial statement).....	658
Domestic and family violence—Safer Families Levy—update (Ministerial statement)	662
Early childhood education—preschool for 3-year-olds (Ministerial statement)	669
Light rail—order for production of documents	672
Appropriation Bill 2024-2025 (No 2)	676
Questions without notice:	
Transport Canberra—electric buses—procurement	686
Transport Canberra—electric buses—procurement	687
Transport Canberra—MyWay+.....	688
Health—primary health care	689
Canberra Health Services—orthopaedic surgery	691
Canberra Hospital—training accreditation	692
Planning and development—Kambah	693
Transport Canberra—bus frequency	695
Law and justice—age of criminal responsibility	696
Freestanding birth centre—feasibility study.....	697
Transport Canberra—MyWay+.....	698
Public schools—funding.....	699
Budget—deficit	700
Taxation—revoked duty exemptions.....	701
Disability—Disability Reform Taskforce	702
Planning—Hawker group centre	703
Supplementary answers to questions without notice:	
Health—primary health care	704
Pest control—termites	704
Libraries ACT—resourcing	705
Justice—bail law reform	721
Appropriation Bill 2024-2025 (No 2)	748
Statements by members:	
St John the Apostle Primary School—fete	755
Hawker Community Repair Cafe	756
Child care—Forrest Primary School out-of-hours school care	756
Land—community use	757
Adjournment:	
Hawker Community Repair Cafe	757
LGBTIQA+ affairs—International Transgender Day of Visibility.....	758

Wednesday, 19 March 2025

MR SPEAKER (Mr Parton) (10.01): Members:

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

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

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

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

Paper

Pursuant to section 189 of the Integrity Commission Act 2018, Mr Speaker presented the following report:

Integrity Commission Act, pursuant to section 189—*Investigation Report Operation Juno—Concerning certain conduct of Mr Walter Sofronoff KC*, dated 18 March 2025.

MS CASTLEY (Yerrabi—Leader of the Opposition) (10.02), by leave: I wish to make a brief statement on the Integrity Commission. While members have not had an opportunity to read this report, I wanted to acknowledge the work of the Integrity Commissioner and his team. I thank the commission for undertaking their work on Operation Juno and for their tireless commitment to ensuring the integrity of our public sector.

I think all Canberrans should be glad that we have an Integrity Commission. There are, of course, a range of views about aspects of their work, their resourcing and the laws that frame the commission's activities. But I do not think anyone in the community, or here in the Assembly, feels the commission is redundant in any way. For that reason, I hope it is spared from any cuts that the government may be considering in this year's budget. Its work is absolutely essential, and we need to ensure the commission is adequately resourced to investigate and expose corruption in the public sector, without fear or favour.

That is why I moved, and the Assembly agreed to, a motion earlier this year calling on the government to provide the commission with funding to undertake an inquiry into lobbying in the ACT. Labor supported that motion, and I think members had every expectation that they would follow through. However, the motion on the Burrangiri Aged Care Respite centre last week has given me pause. Like the motion supporting the inquiry into lobbying, that motion called on the government to act and it was supported by the government. But, immediately after the Burrangiri motion was agreed,

the minister, Ms Stephen-Smith, told members that it changed nothing—or words to that effect—and said that there was no intention of complying with the motion that she and the government had supported—and this is quite shocking.

It would be very concerning if the same were to occur with resourcing for the Integrity Commission. I hope the Chief Minister can provide an assurance to the Assembly. Perhaps he could do so right away, given that he is with us in the chamber. The fight against corruption and misconduct is simply too important to be underfunded. So I hope the Chief Minister will rise in response and confirm that his government will fund the lobbying inquiry in this year's budget, as it agreed to do last month.

Putting that issue aside, I am sure that I, along with probably every member in this place, will be reading and digesting the report today. I thank every member of the commission for their work in the investigation, in preparing the report and in ensuring that it was available for us today.

MR BARR (Kurrajong—Chief Minister, Minister for Economic Development and Minister for Tourism and Trade) (10.03), by leave: From the outset, Mr Speaker, this matter that you have just tabled has been of grave concern to me. I made that very public at the time. I stand by those concerns, and I, like others, look forward to reading the final report of the Integrity Commissioner in relation to this matter.

The pre-prepared material from the Leader of the Opposition does raise some interesting questions about advanced knowledge of the tabling of this report—that also raises some concerns. But, I would observe that, given the graveness of the report, perhaps seeking to politicise that this morning was not ideal. I reiterate the point that I have made previously: that the government will, of course, through the appropriate legislative processes, consider all of the proposals that come forward from officers of the Legislative Assembly through the formal process—that you have now already participated in once yourself—and that it is not for me this morning to pre-empt budget decisions. Of course, the work of the Integrity Commission is important, but it does not guarantee a blank cheque for every single proposal that comes forward from the Integrity Commission. The business cases have to be independently assessed and the advice provided to the Expenditure Review Committee and, ultimately, to the cabinet.

On the matter of lobbying, I am very much in favour of work to that accord. One of the issues that I will be raising with the Integrity Commission is the public publishing of diaries of all members of the Legislative Assembly, not just ministers. Lobbying occurs for all of us, and only some of us make public our diaries and who we are meeting with. I think that is an issue that definitely should be pursued, because the public has a right to know who is meeting with me, as much as they have a right to know who is meeting with every single member of the Assembly.

With that, we look forward to the full detail of the report that you have just tabled.

Petition

The following petition was lodged for presentation:

Community organisations—Fearless Women—funding—petition 12-25

By **Ms Barry**, from 459 residents:

The Speaker and Members of the Legislative Assembly

We, the undersigned residents of the Australian Capital Territory, respectfully bring to the Assembly's attention the urgent need for funding for the ACT-registered charity, Fearless Women. Without this support, Fearless Women will be forced to cease operations, a loss that would deeply impact our community.

Fearless Women's Empowerment Program offers essential mentoring, counselling, and educational services to girls and young women in the ACT, helping them navigate the challenges of everyday life. Through their engagement with Fearless Women, these girls develop the confidence, courage, resilience, and hope necessary to become healthy, socially and productively engaged women.

We, therefore, request the Assembly provide the necessary funding to Fearless Women as outlined in their submission to the ACT 2025-26 Budget process.

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

Motion to take note of petition

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

That the petition so lodged be noted.

MS BARRY (Ginninderra) (10.08): I rise to table a petition signed by 459 Canberrans, seeking that the Assembly provide the necessary funding to Fearless Women as outlined in their submission to the ACT 2025-2026 budget process. While the petition did not reach the required 500 signatures, I seek leave to move a motion that the petition be referred to the Standing Committee on Public Accounts and Administration for consideration. I understand that my colleague Thomas Emerson will be supporting this motion.

Leave granted.

MS BARRY: I move:

That petition No 012-25 on funding provision to Fearless Women be referred to the Standing Committee on Public Accounts and Administration.

Established in 2020, Fearless Women is a not-for-profit organisation that provides free education, mentoring and counselling to foster a sense of belonging and empowerment in young women.

The challenge it seeks to address is the declining mental health in girls, which extends beyond immediate psychological outcomes and influences broader developmental trajectories. Poor mental health or wellbeing can result in academic challenges that hinder educational progression and future life choices. This decline can have cascading

effects into adulthood, potentially impacting long-term outcomes such as employability, job performance and overall life satisfaction. Fearless Women provides an inclusive, safe space for young women to enhance their self-belief, inner strength and resilience and to find their way fearlessly.

To avoid the need for expensive and longer-term mental health services, Fearless Women intervenes early and provides young women with support, role modelling, healthy skills development and community. I have been to this service myself, and I can attest to the fact that they do a lot for young women. Recognising the effects intersectional disadvantage has on the mental health and wellbeing of young women, Fearless Women's programs are delivered without cost to recipients.

Its Fearless Future education program is highly sought by many schools. It shares contemporary theory and practical guidance for many students who would not have access to such content. It has received positive feedback from parents and carers, who noted that their children are becoming more willing to leave the house, with mentees invariably returning home from their mentoring activities in a positive spirit—happy, proud, engaged and excited. Its Let's Talk About program is a multimodule empowerment and mental health program that is also highly sought after by primary schools, with its individual modules of friendship, emotions and character strengths frequently requested as one-off sessions for specific year groups. Its counselling program has been very successful in reducing symptoms and improving resilience and coping skills.

In its submission to the ACT government budget, Fearless Women has indicated that it seeks to continue to provide comprehensive programs around mental health and wellbeing and the challenges that are faced by young women in the ACT. Fearless Women has the capacity to fundraise some of the funds needed to enable delivery of the services; however, without sustainable core funding from the ACT government, Fearless Women will be forced to cease operations in mid-2025.

Like many community sector organisations, Fearless Women makes an invaluable contribution that fills a gap in service delivery. I ask that the Assembly support my motion that this petition be referred to the Standing Committee on Public Accounts and Administration, and ask that government give serious consideration to funding proposed by Fearless Women in the budget process.

MR EMERSON (Kurrajong) (10.12): I rise to support Ms Barry's motion to refer Fearless Women's petition to the committee. Fearless Women delivers essential support for young Canberran girls and women that are not offered elsewhere. It was founded in answer to the need for a Menslink equivalent for girls in the ACT, who statistically experience the highest levels of psychological distress in the country. Fearless Women follows a very similar form to Menslink, providing school education courses, targeted mentoring for vulnerable girls and free counselling. Last financial year, 122 education program sessions were delivered to girls in years 3 to 10; 86 girls participated in the mentor program; and 174 girls were on the waitlist to join the program.

There is no equivalent service in the ACT that provides these urgently needed services for girls. Yet, Fearless Women relies almost solely on investors and its own fundraising to deliver its programs. It has received a one-off \$160,000 payment from the

government to pilot its counselling program, which will have run out by the end of this financial year. Without financial certainty and sustainable funding, Fearless Women is unable to make ambitious forward plans and operates currently on a month-by-month lease.

We know that girls are experiencing feelings of loneliness, anxiety and depression at unprecedented rates, with social media dependency and online bullying presenting new challenges. When we pilot initiatives like these and they work, we need to back them with secure, ongoing funding. That is why I am supportive of referring this petition to the committee.

DR PATERSON (Murrumbidgee—Minister for Police, Fire and Emergency Services, Minister for Women, Minister for the Prevention of Family and Domestic Violence, Minister for Corrections and Minister for Gaming Reform) (10.14): I would like to stand and say, firstly, how much I support and thank Glenda and her team for the work that they do at Fearless Women. I have spoken to Glenda a few times previous to this role and now in the role as Minister for Women. I expressed to Glenda that there are budget processes that we need to go through. So we will go through those processes, as I think this motion speaks to.

The other thing that I would like to point out is that there are significant services available to women and girls in the ACT in respect to mental health. Some of these services include the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service, which provides assessment and treatment for children and young people experiencing moderate to severe mental health difficulties; the Adolescent Mobile Outreach Service, which offers assessment and treatment for adolescents 13 to 18; the CAHMS Dialectical Behaviour Therapy program, which targets adolescents 14 to 18 who are experiencing difficulties managing emotions and who have pervasive patterns of relationship challenges; the Eating Disorders Clinical Hub, which serves as a central referral point for eating disorder services, offering assessment and treatment for individuals living with an eating disorder; the Adolescent Intensive Home Treatment Team, which provides intensive follow-up support to individuals under 18 who have been discharged from hospital and have mental health vulnerabilities; the CAHMS Cottage, a day program for young people with moderate to severe mental health issues that impact their ability to attend school; the Specialist Youth Mental Health Outreach Team, which supports young people experiencing their first episode of psychosis or those at high risk of developing psychosis; and the Youth Step Up, Step Down Program, a residential facility for young people aged between 18 and 25 who are experiencing mental illness.

In the domestic and family violence space, there are a few programs like the Australian Childhood Foundation's Heartfelt Groupwork Pilot for children aged five to 12; the PCYC Solid Ground Program; and the Beryl Women, Children and Young People Safe and Strong mobile van program. So there is a significant array of programs, which I think is appropriate, and I see Fearless Women as very much part of that array of programs that are offered to women and girls in the ACT.

I very much support the discussion prior to budget. and this will go through a budget process. I support the motion.

Ms Barry's motion resolved in the affirmative.

MR SPEAKER: The question now is that the petition so lodged be noted.

MISS NUTTALL (Brindabella) (10.17): I would like to thank Ms Barry for tabling this important petition today. We are very supportive of organisations like Fearless Women continuing to have funding for the amazing services that they provide. I was really grateful to be able to hear about Fearless Women from my colleague Jo Clay and my advisor Cindy, who attended the Soroptimist International Women's Day Breakfast, where the CEO, Glenda Stevens, talked about the programs and research that they have been conducting.

As members in this chamber have highlighted, one in three women have emotional or mental stress, and girls in the ACT aged 15 to 19 experience a higher rate of psychological distress than any other Australian jurisdiction. That is something that has resonated with me as someone who struggled with my mental health as a young woman. Fearless Women is volunteer based. What it does really well is it addresses—to borrow a great term often used in this Assembly—a missing middle of girls who feel like they cannot reach out for help until their challenges are big enough. Often, as women, we are sort of socialised to try and deal with the problem on our own and sometimes it can be hard to ask for help.

I understand that Fearless Women has about 300 women and girls on the waitlist for its program, which is pretty impressive. Clearly, this is a service that is in high demand. For a program that supports women to not have their funding continued when a program that supports men does, it feels like maybe we should bring the same energy for both.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Economy—snapshot of ACT economy in 2025

Ministerial statement

MR BARR (Kurrajong—Chief Minister, Minister for Economic Development and Minister for Tourism and Trade) (10.21): I rise this morning to update the Assembly on the state of the territory economy and the government's economic development priorities.

The government is committed to maintaining a strong and sustainable economy for Canberra and the region, which underpins the government's ability to meet the needs of our community now and into the future. The state of the territory economy is strong. It is influenced heavily by helpful commonwealth policy settings as well as local efforts to diversify our labour market, create jobs and maintain consumer and investor confidence.

The territory's gross state product continues to grow, as does our population. The GSP grew at a rate of four per cent for fiscal 2023-24, which is above its long-run average of 3¾ per cent. The growth was driven by increases in public consumption and investment, household consumption and improvements in net interstate trade. As a point of comparison, our gross state product grew the second-fastest in the nation and significantly faster than an economy with a similar size to ours, Tasmania, which saw growth of only 1.4 per cent in fiscal 2023-24. State final demand also grew 3.6 per cent

through the year to the December quarter 2024, which was the highest among Australia's states and territories.

We have a very strong labour market, with record levels of employment, low unemployment, incredibly high participation rates and solid growth in real wages. Unemployment in January of this year was recorded at 3.2 per cent, the lowest in the country. In fact, as a jurisdiction, we have experienced unemployment under four per cent since February 2024. Total employment grew by 3.5 per cent through the year to January 2025 and workforce participation is at 72.4 per cent, considerably above the national average. There are approaching 275,000 people in employment across the territory—273,600 according to the ABS. The ACT generates 50 per cent, or \$22.8 billion, of its economic activity from three main industry sectors: unsurprisingly, the public sector but also professional scientific services and health. Around 144,000 people were employed across these three sectors in 2023.

The strength of our labour market is also resulting in a growing population, having now exceeded 470,000 people. On current projections, the territory's population should cross half a million people sometime in fiscal 2026-27.

The strength of our territory economy certainly comes in the face of significant external pressures on households and businesses and, notably, a period of high inflation. Thankfully, there is now mounting evidence that inflation is easing. The latest inflation figures show that Canberra's CPI slowed to 2.2 per cent through the year to the December quarter 2024. This reflects slower growth in prices for groceries, automotive fuel and housing, including lower electricity prices due to the introduction of the 2024-25 Commonwealth Energy Bill Relief Fund rebates. In the December quarter, underlying inflation had fallen to 3.2 per cent, which suggests inflationary pressures are easing a little more quickly than the Reserve Bank expected.

Increasing housing supply is a high priority for the government. There are currently around 200,000 dwellings in the territory, and the government has a comprehensive housing supply strategy to enable an additional 30,000 homes to be released by the end of 2030. This will occur through a combination of new suburban land releases, new urban renewal precincts and planning and zoning reforms that Minister Steel is leading.

The government particularly seeks to enable an increase in the territory's housing supply through more missing middle homes. The capability of the territory to sprawl even further outward is obviously limited and future greenfield developments will be more complicated in the future and more expensive as we reach the limits of the territory border. That is why the missing middle planning reforms are important for the future of the city. Through these reforms, we aim to provide more well-located homes that are close to local shops and services and transport routes.

The government is also committed to increasing the supply of social housing over the next four years, particularly through partnerships with the commonwealth government and the community housing sector to deliver more affordable rentals. A great example of this collaboration was the recent announcement that a little over 750 new affordable homes in the ACT will be supported through the first round of the Housing Australia Future Fund. If only this could have happened a few years earlier.

Of course, with the expected increase in housing supply comes a need to invest in transport infrastructure. We will continue to deliver our plans for an integrated public transport network for the city. Work is clearly underway on the next stage of the light rail network, connecting the CBD to Commonwealth Park, and new housing opportunities along that extension. I am advised that our electric bus fleet is the largest per capita in the nation. Our new purpose-built electric bus depot in Woden, which Minister Steel talked about yesterday, will support our broader ambition to see our public transport fleet transition to zero emissions by 2040 or, indeed, earlier.

Through a combination of public and private developments, our CBD is currently undergoing the biggest transformation we have ever seen. The CBD's gross value add to the ACT economy has increased from \$6.2 billion in 2019 to \$7.4 billion in 2024. By 2031, we expect more than 15,000 people will reside in the broader CBD precinct and over 45,000 people will work in the city on a daily basis. Projects like the Acton Waterfront are helping to realise the vision to extend the city to the lake, and the new UNSW Canberra campus on Constitution Avenue will also expand the eastern footprint of the CBD. Smaller but impactful urban realm upgrades, like the revitalisation of the historic Sydney and Melbourne buildings and upgrades to Garema Place, are also enhancing the city precinct.

The government will also add to the CBD through a number of additional projects. This includes the Canberra Theatre Centre transformation, which will create a performing arts centre of national significance. It will boost the local economy by attracting more visitors and creating more jobs in the arts, cultural and hospitality sectors. The government is in the process of finalising procurement for the construction of the new Canberra Lyric Theatre as the first stage of this transformation.

We have also commenced work with the commonwealth to build a new Canberra Aquatic Centre in Commonwealth Park. Having secured support for the use of the land from the Prime Minister, the government is commissioning planning and concept design work for the new centre. Once complete, this project will also allow for progress on the new Canberra Convention and Entertainment Centre. The new centre will be a destination for larger business events. It will create further jobs in the visitor economy, be home for large-scale events and concerts and enhance Canberra's reputation as a knowledge-based and arts destination.

The government is also renewing precincts right across our city. In Belconnen, work has already begun with the commonwealth on their \$250 million investment to revitalise the Australian Institute of Sport campus ahead of the 2032 Brisbane Olympics. This precinct supports the government's ambitions in sport, health, education and research, taking advantage of the strengths of the University of Canberra and the Canberra Institute of Technology. The precinct will also include the new north side hospital and a new stadium, with early work indicating around 1,000 new dwellings could also be situated across the precinct.

In the Woden town centre, work will soon be complete on the CIT Woden campus, delivering education and training to approximately 6,500 students. The new campus will be supported by a new public transport interchange as well as planning for a future light rail terminus. The Gungahlin town centre will soon undergo a further expansion to the east, with additional commercial and housing opportunities to support the region.

More than \$20 million in local infrastructure upgrades have been committed to the Tuggeranong region over the next four years, on top of the opening of new health facilities, including the South Tuggeranong Health Centre and the new hydrotherapy pool.

I have also had some very positive discussions with management at South Point Tuggeranong on additional build-to-rent housing opportunities in the town centre. Planning has commenced on the future town centre in Molonglo, which will also feature a number of ACT government services to cater for the growing population.

This is an ambitious program and, like many state and territory governments, the rising costs of construction and labour shortages necessarily impact the pace of delivery of the totality of the government's infrastructure plan. The government, through Infrastructure Canberra, aims to maintain a realistic program of capital works over the coming decade. But another significant factor to the delivery of infrastructure is quite obviously a willing partner at the commonwealth level. It has certainly been a huge welcome to the people of Canberra to have a Prime Minister who is interested in our city, who lives here and who has committed funding to infrastructure projects in the territory.

Alongside public investments in infrastructure projects, we will, of course, continue to seek new private investment and support ongoing diversification of our economy. This includes the establishment of the new Active Capital Fund. The fund will support start-ups, the innovation ecosystem and the commercialisation of ideas generated by ACT-based tertiary education, research and business sectors.

It is in this context that we touch upon the role of international education. Members would be familiar with the fact that international education is the territory's largest export industry. It was valued at \$1.5 billion in fiscal 2023-24 and plays an essential role in attracting permanent and skilled migrants to our city. It is very pleasing that our graduates have amongst the best employment outcomes of all Australians. We will continue to work, to attract international students, promoting Canberra's reputation as a knowledge-driven, well-connected, safe and inclusive city.

Growing our tourism sector is another contributor to our jurisdiction's economic growth. Tourism in the territory is strong, and we are on track to grow our visitor economy to \$5 billion by 2030. Total visitor spend for the year ending September 2024 was \$3.65 billion. Our tourism strategy is supported by our major events calendar, seeking to showcase our city to a broad and diverse audience. Events are an important part of our visitor economy, encouraging visitors and event participants to travel and to give visitors a reason to stay longer. In 2024, the estimated direct economic impact of our events calendar was over \$56 million.

We have just finished delivering Enlighten 2025, with audiences flocking to the National Triangle to enjoy the illuminations, great outdoor dining and the range of special events. We have also seen this past weekend, and already during the week, dozens and dozens of balloons returning to John Dunmore Lang Place. This is a larger area that can accommodate many thousands of people and gives one of Canberra's favourite events an opportunity to grow further into the future. We have also committed to expanding Floriade, which is our jurisdiction's biggest tourism event, to introduce

drone shows to the Enlighten Festival and to work with the National Capital Authority to bring back the Birdman Rally as part of a future Canberra Day program.

This year, we also welcome the British and Irish Lions Rugby tour and the Australian Masters Games to Canberra. We are continuing our work with Cricket ACT and Cricket Australia to establish a Canberra women's and men's big bash club, alongside ongoing financial support for local elite sporting teams.

We will continue to support our tourism goals through positive developments in aviation, partnerships with Tourism Australia, Canberra Airport and airlines to connect Canberra with new domestic and international destinations. At the moment, Canberra Airport is directly connected to 12 domestic destinations and also provides direct connections to Fiji and onwards to the United States and Canada, thanks to our partnership with Fiji Airways. Our priorities in aviation development include direct flights to New Zealand and the resumption of direct flights to Singapore.

Ongoing investment in Canberra's hotel and accommodation sector will also directly support efforts to reach that \$5 billion visitor expenditure target by 2030. New hotel developments currently in planning or under construction signal a further vote of confidence in the territory's growing visitor economy. They present opportunities to further raise the profile of our region as a tourism, trade and business destination and, importantly, with international hotel partners, provide access to new distribution networks with hundreds of millions of members.

In closing, both the commonwealth and ACT governments are working together on the territory's economic development, supporting jobs and growth in our city. There is, of course, a risk that these shared economic development goals and timeframes could be set back by a change of government at the forthcoming federal election. In the simplest possible terms: a constructive commonwealth partner means more can be delivered more quickly.

Regardless, though, of the federal election result, the ACT government remains focused on delivering the comprehensive array of strategic projects, programs and partnerships to build on a nation-leading 33 years of continuous economic growth and further diversification of the territory's economy. We will continue to deliver on our plan to build Canberra's future, to create more local jobs and to strengthen our economy—all of which comes together as part of an overall objective to ensure that Canberra remains one of the most liveable places in the world.

I present the following paper:

Snapshot of the ACT Economy in 2025—Ministerial statement, 19 March 2025.

I move:

That the Assembly take note of the paper.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Domestic and family violence—Safer Families Levy—update

Ministerial statement

DR PATERSON (Murrumbidgee—Minister for Police, Fire and Emergency Services, Minister for Women, Minister for the Prevention of Family and Domestic Violence, Minister for Corrections and Minister for Gaming Reform) (10.36): Today I rise as Minister for the Prevention of Family and Domestic Violence to table the government’s response to the ACT Auditor-General’s performance audit report titled *Safer Families Levy* and to address the “domestic and family violence—Safer Families Levy” motion, which passed in the Assembly on 4 December last year.

In response to the Auditor-General’s performance report, on 22 November last year, the ACT Auditor-General’s office tabled its report into the Safer Families Levy. The ACT government welcomes the report and remains committed to ensuring investment of funds raised through the levy are targeted and effective in addressing domestic, family and sexual violence. The Safer Families Levy raises critical funds, which go towards addressing domestic, family and sexual violence. It also supports community awareness of this issue, which impacts the health, safety and wellbeing of so many people in the ACT.

It is important to note that the levy provides only a partial offset to the ACT government’s larger investment in addressing this critical issue. In its report, the Audit Office considered whether the levy is being managed effectively to fund activities to address domestic and family violence. It found that since its inception, funds from the levy have all gone towards addressing domestic, family and sexual violence. It also found that decisions to fund initiatives have been informed by sufficient research and clear assessment of community need and expected benefits. However, the audit report identified opportunities to strengthen management of the levy. It made four recommendations to improve the administration, performance, monitoring and public reporting on levy expenditure. I am pleased to announce that the ACT government agrees to all four of the recommendations. Importantly, work is already underway to address each of them.

Recommendation 1 of the report states that the government should do three things as part of the design and implementation of the ACT Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Strategy. The first is to establish accessible communication products to update the community on initiatives funded through the levy. The second is to develop principles for funding initiatives and to communicate how the principles are being implemented. The third is to establish clearly documented feedback mechanisms to inform planning and design of initiatives. The ACT government agrees with all three components of this recommendation.

In response to this recommendation and the Safer Families Levy motion, I wish to reiterate that the ACT government is committed to developing a comprehensive, evidence-based ACT domestic, family and sexual violence strategy. This strategy will drive ambitious reform to prevent domestic, family and sexual violence and support victim-survivors to stay safe and heal. Throughout this year, the development of the strategy will progress in close collaboration with victim-survivors and community stakeholders. Additionally, the government will provide clear and accessible communication products to update the community on levy-funded initiatives, including as part of the ACT budget papers each year.

In addition, the government will combine the “safer families” and the “sexual assault prevention and response” ministerial statements to deliver one comprehensive domestic, family and sexual violence ministerial statement annually to the Legislative Assembly. The combined annual statement will include more detailed information on the implementation of domestic, family and sexual violence initiatives, including those funded through the levy. The statement will be available in *Hansard*, and a copy will be provided directly to community stakeholders.

The government also agrees with the need to develop a set of principles which guide levy expenditure. I am very pleased to announce that the government has completed this recommendation through endorsing a set of principles to govern levy funding expenditure. These principles are outlined in the government’s response. The principles were developed in consultation with key domestic, family and sexual violence community-sector organisations. I would like to thank all the organisations who generously provided feedback on the draft principles to ensure that the levy is used most effectively to prevent violence and meet the needs of victim-survivors in the ACT.

These principles will also be published on the ACT government’s website. They outline the commitment to ensure the use of the levy funding aligns with the National Plan to End Violence Against Women and Children 2022-2032 and with any current or future ACT strategies or plans addressing domestic, family and sexual violence. Importantly, these principles clarify that the full amount of funding collected through the levy each year must go towards frontline services to address domestic, family and sexual violence in the ACT. The principles will be implemented and applied to new initiatives being considered for levy funding from the 2025-26 budget onwards.

The ACT government will also develop feedback mechanisms to inform planning and design of any newly-funded initiatives. The details of this will be developed in consultation with victim-survivors and stakeholders as we develop the ACT Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Strategy.

Recommendation 2 of the audit report is to establish a common evaluation framework for initiatives funded through the levy and to establish regular performance reporting to the Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Coordinator-General. The ACT government agrees with this recommendation.

A monitoring and evaluation framework will be developed in consultation with stakeholders through the development of the strategy. The framework will establish a consistent approach to how the ACT government monitors, reports and evaluates ACT government reforms and initiatives to address domestic, family and sexual violence, including those funded by the levy. It will also include monitoring and evaluation at a systems and initiative level to ensure progress and impact is measured. The framework will complement the national Outcomes Framework 2023-32 Under the National Plan to End Violence Against Women and Children.

In response to recommendation 3 of the report, the government agrees that processes to monitor and report on the implementation of recommendations of the past biennial reports of the Domestic and Family Violence Review Coordinator should be established to strengthen accountability. The Domestic and Family Violence Review aims to

prevent future deaths by looking closely at domestic and family violence-related deaths and identifying patterns to inform system responses. The first death review report was presented to the Assembly in February last year and provided 12 recommendations to government and community to improve responses to domestic and family violence.

The ACT government has progressed implementation of the recommendations from the death review report. For example, the 2024-25 budget committed \$375,000 to increase understanding and improve responses to coercive control, which was a key finding from the first report.

To implement recommendation 3, the ACT government report will respond to the future reports by tabling a ministerial statement in the Legislative Assembly. The ministerial statement will provide an update on the implementation of recommendations in previous reports.

Future reports will also include a status update on recommendations from previous reports. The second report from the death review is due to me at the end of 2025. I look forward to reporting back to the Assembly on the implementation of previous recommendations at the time of responding.

Finally, the ACT government agrees with recommendation 4 of the report: to improve reporting on use of levy funds and establish reporting processes on planned and actual performance of initiatives, along with analysis of any variations between the two. As I previously mentioned, the ACT government will release a Safer Families Levy information sheet in the context of each ACT budget. The information sheet will clearly articulate the government's investment in domestic, family and sexual violence, including how the levy is being used. Alongside established reporting mechanisms, the monitoring and evaluation framework that will be developed as part of the strategy will address planned and actual performance reporting of initiatives against the strategy.

I will address some of the points from the Safer Families Levy motion. On 4 December last year, the Assembly passed this motion moved by Ms Morris. This motion called on the ACT government to action a set of requests in relation to the audit report on the Safer Families Levy. I am pleased to now provide an update on the government's progress against these requests.

The motion requests the government provide evidence that no money generated through the Safer Families Levy has been directed to other areas of government service or administration. The audit report confirms that funding from the levy has all gone towards addressing domestic, family and sexual violence. However, as I have already stated, the ACT government has made changes to ensure that the levy is focused on frontline responses to domestic and family violence.

I want to highlight and acknowledge that decisions on the use of the levy funds have changed over time in responses to the evolving need in the community. When the levy was first introduced, it contributed to the establishment of the Coordinator-General for Family Safety within the government, an important step in coordinating action to address domestic and family violence. Prior to this, there was no coordination policy or program function within government directed to addressing domestic and family violence.

In 2021, the role of coordinator-general was further expanded to include sexual violence. However, from 2024-25, the ACT government ensured funds from the levy are no longer used to employ non-frontline ACT government employees. Because of this decision of government, levy funds are now entirely committed to frontline services, delivered by either community sector services or areas of government, that directly provide services to members of the public to prevent or respond to domestic, family and sexual violence. It remains a priority of the ACT government to ensure the frontline domestic family and service system is adequately resourced to respond effectively.

The motion called on the government to explore establishing a discrete fund, separate from consolidated revenue, for the receipt, management and reporting of all activity related to the levy. The revenue raised by the levy is collected by the Chief Minister, Treasury and Economic Development Directorate and is distributed to the Territory Banking Account. For the purposes of the Financial Management Act 1996, this account is a singular account to which all the consolidated revenue is transferred into.

Treasury and the Community Services Directorate have explored the possibility of establishing a mechanism to separate the levy from the Territory Banking Account and found that this will require significant resourcing, manual reconciliations and potential legislative changes. It would not be practical or cost-effective to create a discrete fund. Although establishment of a separate account is not practical, I am dedicated to ensuring expenditure of the levy is fully transparent and targeted to where it is most needed.

As the motion acknowledged, access to housing is a vital part of allowing victim-survivors of domestic and family violence to stay safe and to heal. Housing ACT has a range of options available to support victim-survivors, including linking them in with emergency accommodation providers; supporting them with an application for an urgent transfer to a new tenancy; supporting them to remain living in a property with security upgrades if required; and supporting their choice to leave a tenancy, or linking them with a legal service so they can apply in the ACT Civil and Administrative Tribunal to either have a perpetrator removed from a tenancy agreement or have a tenancy placed solely in their name. Other public housing supports include fixing property damage and providing guidance and referral to supports for financial and legal assistance for debt accrued due to domestic and family violence.

In 2024-25, approximately \$36.6 million was allocated to organisations across the ACT homelessness sector to fund various programs, including emergency crisis and transitional accommodation; domestic, family and sexual violence support and counselling; food and engagement services; central intake; advocacy services; and peak body representation services. Of this, \$6.3 million has been provided to six programs targeted specifically at women and children experiencing or at risk of homelessness, and family and domestic violence. Women's services in the ACT specialist homelessness sector have extensive experience and expertise in supporting the unique needs of women and children experiencing hardship.

The motion also called on the ACT to advise how it would invest in providing more Justice Housing properties. The Justice Housing Program is a collaboration between the Justice and Community Safety Directorate, the Community Services Directorate and

the social and community housing sector and support agencies. The program aims to meet the diverse needs of people in the criminal justice system who are on bail or exiting custody, including perpetrators of domestic, family and sexual violence.

The ACT government committed \$4.832 million to this program over the 2024-25 and 2025-26 financial years. Accommodation provided through the Justice Housing Program is intended to act as a stepping stone to a longer-term or permanent accommodation in public housing, community housing or the private rental market. The Justice Housing Program currently has 10 properties, two of which are allocated for women, with a total of 30 beds. ACT Corrective Services is continuing to collaborate with the service providers, community stakeholders and residents of the program to refine the service model.

A strategy is in place to pilot an expansion of the Justice Housing Program to target people with complex and special needs who require additional support, and a procurement process will commence in 2025. This program will focus on providing intensive support and skills enhancement for those most at risk of homelessness.

In addition to the Justice Housing Program, ACT Corrective Services also administers the Transitional Accommodation Program, which offers accommodation for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men exiting custody or bail programs. The program has currently two properties with two beds each. Yeddung Mura Aboriginal Corporation is contracted to deliver this program until September 25. A new procurement process to continue the program will begin early this year.

The motion also called on the ACT government to implement its commitments to meet the particular needs of First Nations people escaping domestic, family and sexual violence, including by ensuring all frontline services are equipped to provide culturally safe support. The ACT government is committed to addressing the impacts of domestic, family and sexual violence on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities in the ACT. To do this, the government is working in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to build a strong community-controlled sector.

Prior to 2022-23, the ACT government did not fund any Aboriginal community-controlled organisations to provide dedicated services. Since then, the government has provided over \$4 million to ACCOs and Aboriginal-led organisations, to deliver intensive case management and support to victim-survivors, interventions to promote behaviour change in people who use violence, and prevention and healing activities.

Principle 5 of the new Safer Families Levy principles supports this continuing investment, stating that a meaningful proportion of levy funding goes to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-led programs, particularly ACCOs. I would like to acknowledge that *The long yarn* report was formally presented to the previous Minister for the Prevention of Domestic and Family Violence on 19 August last year, and the ACT government is committed to implementing the recommendations of this report.

Recommendation 11 of the report highlights how training and other initiatives are required to build the capacity of services, including justice services, in responding to both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander victim-survivors, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who have used violence. It is crucial that mainstream domestic,

family and sexual violence services are equipped to provide culturally safe services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. The ACT government will continue to work with the community sector, including the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community, to ensure mainstream services are accessible and are culturally appropriate for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Consultations on the ACT Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Strategy will also consider what further training and resourcing is required to assist organisations to deliver sustainable, high-quality services which address the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. I will be tabling a response to *The long yarn* report later this year. This will provide another opportunity to update the Assembly on this important work.

Additionally, as part of Housing ACT's funding arrangements to the ACT homelessness sector, women's refuges and other specialist homelessness services are required to integrate into their service approach the provision of culturally safe, equitable and inclusive services that respond to the needs of all clients, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander clients.

There is still so much to do, and as the Minister for Prevention of Domestic and Family Violence, I am deeply committed to continuing this work with victim-survivors, with the organisations who work so hard to keep victim-survivors safe, and with our whole community to make sure that the ACT is a safe space for everyone.

Mr Speaker, I would like to finish by thanking the Auditor-General and his staff for their comprehensive audit and the associated recommendations. The ACT government is committed to addressing domestic, family and sexual violence and implementing all of the Audit Office's recommendations, as evidenced by the work already underway or planned. I look forward to seeing the results of this important work.

I present the following papers:

Auditor-General Act, pursuant to section 21—Auditor-General's Report No 10/2024—Safer Families Levy—Government response, undated.

Safer Families Levy—Government response (in response to ACT Auditor-General's Report No 10/24 and Safer Families Levy—Transparency—Assembly resolution of 4 December 2024)—Ministerial statement, 19 March 2025.

I move:

That the Assembly take note of the statement.

MR EMERSON (Kurrajong) (10.56): I rise to thank Minister Paterson for her statement this morning. I am pleased with the government's commitment to ensure that funds from the levy will no longer be diverted to employ non-frontline government employees—and, obviously, they never should have. I am also pleased by the assurance that future expenditure of this levy will be fully transparent and targeted to where it is most needed.

I am hearing from our community that one area in which targeted funding is most

needed is in providing crisis support for First Nations people escaping family, domestic and sexual violence. I note the commitment the minister has made in the statement to ensure all frontline services are equipped to provide culturally safe support to meet the needs of First Nations people. I have been told repeatedly that is not currently the case, which might not be captured by the statistics, because First Nations people, sadly, do not always feel safe contacting some mainstream service providers. I implore the ACT government to endeavour to have vital services delivered to First Nations people by First Nations people, including by investing in the urgent establishment of a specialist ACCO providing FDV crisis services.

Minister, you have my full support and that of our community in showing ambition when it comes to addressing the impacts of family, domestic and sexual violence in the ACT. My initial sense is that you do intend to grip-up this issue, and I am encouraged by that. Thank you for reinstating funding for the Safer Families Assistance payment earlier this week. It is a small step and one of many that are needed when it comes to investing in the vital frontline services relied upon by vulnerable people experiencing violence in our community.

I hope that we can make Canberra a place where victim-survivors get the support they need when they need it, where long waitlists, cruel triaging processes and narrow criteria for service provision are made a thing of the past. But I also hope for a future where fewer women access crisis accommodation and support, not because the services are not there but because they are no longer needed—a future where women are safer in their homes, workplaces and communities; where our boys grow into men who prioritise the safety of the women and children in their lives; where the crisis subsides; and where prevention, education, and accountability have become our primary response in tackling family, domestic, and sexual violence.

Thank you again, minister, for your statement.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Early childhood education—preschool for 3-year-olds Ministerial statement

MS BERRY (Ginninderra—Deputy Chief Minister, Minister for Education and Early Childhood, Minister for Homes and New Suburbs and Minister for Sport and Recreation) (10.59): Investing in the education of our youngest Canberrans is a priority for this government. We know that equitable access to quality play-based learning is a powerful way to support children’s learning, wellbeing and development. It brings lifelong benefits.

Research has shown that learning and development in the years before school are key determinants of future school achievement, and social, emotional and health outcomes. That is why our universal free three-year-old preschool program is a significant priority for this government and is part of our biggest ever investment in a local early childhood education sector.

As an action of our Set up For Success strategy, we have provided more than \$50 million dollars over four years for free three-year-old preschool and other early

childhood initiatives. Set up For Success is guiding us to achieve our goal of making sure early education is high quality, accessible and affordable; that it connects with other education, community and health services; and, importantly, that it can meet the needs of every child.

This government is delivering on the things that we said we would do. First, in 2020, we started providing access to free early childhood education for three-year-old children who would benefit the most: those experiencing vulnerability or disadvantage. We know that for children experiencing a disadvantage and/or vulnerability, participating in quality early childhood education is life-changing and plays a significant role in turning the curve of inequality.

In January 2024, in our last term of government, we expanded this by providing free three-year-old preschool. It gives Canberran families access to up to 300 hours a year of free preschool through 80 providers, which represents 143 participating early childhood and education and care services. Earlier this year, we celebrated 12 months of this successful program. More than 5,000 Canberran three-year-olds are eligible to take part in the quality play-based learning through three-year-old preschool.

At the end of last year, 3,180 Canberran three-year-olds were accessing the program. In addition to the social, emotional and developmental benefits of early learning that three-year-old preschool offers, the ACT government is proud to have helped ease Canberrans' cost-of-living pressures. The average family with a three-year-old in the program is saving about \$1,330 in fee relief.

Valuing children and investing in their learning and development requires us to value and invest in educators. Our government has committed, through an aligned workforce strategy, to support the early childhood workforce through access to professional learning, best practice resources, scholarships and coaching. We know that early childhood educators are critical to delivering quality early childhood education and care. Without them, it simply would not be possible.

I am proud that the ACT has advocated raising the profile of the early childhood workforce, valuing the work of educators and supporting increased professional recognition. Our support for the ACT's early childhood education and care workforce, through a new workforce strategy, ensures we are taking action to improve sector supports, building capability, and enhancing career pathways and professional recognition.

This is nation-leading work and vital reform. A requirement of the three-year-old preschool program is face-to-face delivery by a qualified early childhood teacher through a phased approach. I am pleased to report that 80 per cent of our partners have their preschool program delivered by a qualified early childhood teacher or a person working towards an approved early childhood program.

This government is supporting the remaining partners to work towards placement of early childhood teachers in all participating services. Last year, an amendment to the Teacher Quality Institute regulatory framework was made to include early childhood teachers. In recognition of this, the ACT government waived the annual \$115 Teacher

Quality Institute fee for early childhood teacher registrations for the first two years to encourage uptake.

The ACT government is committed to doubling universal, free three-year-old preschool so that every child in Canberra can access up to 600 hours per year. We currently have 2,687 children enrolled in the three-year-old preschool program. We are on track to meet or exceed last year's almost 64 per cent take-up of the program by eligible children in Canberra. We continue to work on more early childhood services offering the preschool program. These services must meet quality requirements set by the ACT government and informed by the National Quality Framework.

Key to the success of three-year-old preschool has been our collaboration with the sector. I extend my thanks to the many services and educators who have given their time and feedback to make this program a success. Just a few weeks ago, I visited the YMCA Early Learning Centre in Belconnen. I was able to see firsthand how the program is benefiting our youngest Canberrans and the educators that nurture their early love for learning. We value your work, and we want to make sure that this program is the best that it can be for children, their families, partner providers and our incredible educators.

We have heard your feedback, and we are continuing to reduce the back-end administration so that you can focus on the things that you do best. To quote YMCA Chief Executive Officer Kirsty Dixon, "Just like our children at the YELC here in Belconnen, they fall over, they learn, we listen and we walk alongside. We need to walk alongside and collaborate with the government to roll out this program."

Kirsty talked about YMCA's pride to be associated with our investment in early years education, and I could not be prouder. Our government has long recognised the benefit of investing in quality early childhood education and will continue to invest in our children and young people's learning. Our children are our future, and this government will continue to support high quality early childhood education because we know that this investment benefits our whole community.

I present the following paper:

Three-Year-Old Preschool—Ministerial statement, 19 March 2025.

I move:

That the Assembly take note of the paper.

MISS NUTTALL (Brindabella) (11.06): I would like to begin by thanking Minister Berry for her hard work in this space. The expansion of free three-year-old preschool is an important step in making Canberra a better, more affordable and more equitable city. We were pleased to secure in our supply and confidence agreement a commitment from Labor to expand free three-year-old preschool hours to 15 hours a week by 2028. The additional supports that have been provided to assist early childhood educators are, similarly, very much welcomed.

I wish to speak briefly today about a group who are sadly excluded from the current

free three-year-old preschool arrangements. I speak of children and parents who hold temporary visas. This is a cohort who are particularly vulnerable to a range of difficulties, and we are regularly hearing that families on temporary visas are some of the hardest hit by the cost-of-living crisis.

It is also worth noting that migrants on pathways to permanent residence, which can take three to five years or more after being on temporary visas, are also excluded from accessing this program, in spite of a demonstrated commitment to long-term residence in Canberra and Australia. These families end up starting off on a lower plane than their counterparts due to the financial burden they are forced to bear for early childhood education and care for all the years waiting for their permanent residence visas to be processed.

I appreciate that the targeted three-year-old preschool initiative does allow some children on temporary visas to access some free three-year-old preschool, but I call on the government to explore the expansion of this program. Although it may serve some vulnerable families, the reliance on existing services to identify them instead of allowing families to apply for the program when they need it, may create barriers, especially for migrant families.

We need a Canberra where all children can access high quality, free education from day dot. We have made some important steps down that road, but we can never rest on our laurels.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Light rail—order for production of documents

MS CASTLEY (Yerrabi—Leader of the Opposition) (11.08): I move:

That, in accordance with standing order 213A, the Assembly orders the Minister for Transport to provide the Assembly with:

- (1) any business cases and post-implementation reviews relating to the development of the light rail network, including individual stages;
- (2) the current schedule for the development of each stage of light rail;
- (3) the Early Presentation of Project, Investment Logic Map, and any draft or indicative business cases, economic appraisals, or economic evaluations of Light Rail Stage 2B;
- (4) the estimated total capital cost for Stage 2B, including enabling works, rolling stock, and all other relevant expenses; and
- (5) actual capital expenditure on light rail, including all planning, design and construction costs, and Commonwealth contributions to light rail capital expenditure, for each financial year (2013-2014 to 2023-2024).

I do not intend to make a long contribution today as I think members and the community are well across the issue: the economic case for light rail—the costs of each stage, the benefits, and whether the project stacks up. It is information that we have sought for some years—in fact, for more than a decade—and we have been frustrated at every turn. Labor has sought to justify its investment in light rail as a productivity measure,

and I accept that this could be true, but, for any capital investment to be a productivity measure, the benefits of the project must exceed the costs; otherwise, the investment undermines the productivity of the ACT rather than enhancing it.

Unfortunately, we do not know the full costs of the project to date. We have seen a contract for stage 1 and have seen some indicative numbers but nothing concrete, and certainly nothing that points to the benefits that the government expects to realise from any stage of the project. The purpose of this motion is to access that information by seeking the business cases that have been prepared for each stage of the project. My understanding is that the business case has not been finalised yet for stage 2B, so the motion seeks the current estimate of the total capital costs and any economic appraisals or similar that have been prepared.

We are also seeking the post-implementation reviews which the ACT government prepares as part of its capital framework and should shed light on whether the costs and benefits contained in the initial proposals and documentation were actually realised.

The motion also seeks an answer to a simple question that has apparently eluded the Minister for Transport: does the government consider stages 2A and 2B to be a single stage which it intends to deliver in a single decade, or are these separate stages to be undertaken over two decades?

And, finally, the motion seeks information about the total capital expenditure and the total commonwealth contributions to date. This information is not on the public record but ought to be. The residents of Canberra have a right to know what is being spent out of ACT government money and commonwealth government money so that they can properly weigh up whether the project is providing value for money and whether we should proceed with further investment, because this is one of the critical issues that is going to face the Assembly and the community in this term.

We have a budget that is deeply in debt, and it continues to deteriorate. We have a government that insists on proceeding with a massive investment project that may not actually yield value for money. People have a right to know where we stand before we take the next step, which could well cost us more than \$5 billion, or more than \$10,000 per Canberran. Members have a right to fully understand the economics of this investment before we are asked to vote on appropriations and any legislation to support the project. That is why my motion seeks to understand and why I hope the Assembly will choose to support it today.

Finally, I would like to note that the minister's office was in touch with my office yesterday—I greatly appreciate it—and we have agreed to their request to extend the reporting period from 14 days. I see the amendment has come through for 30 days, but I understand that it takes us to Easter Saturday. I understand that it may be tabled a business day before the 30 days are up. And I understand that this change means that the government will be supporting the motion, so I again thank the minister and his team for their engagement yesterday. I told the chamber that I was willing to work in good faith with the government on these motions, and we can already see the proof of this claim. I hope other ministers take note that we can all work together on securing more transparency into the future.

MR STEEL (Murrumbidgee—Treasurer, Minister for Planning and Sustainable Development, Minister for Heritage and Minister for Transport) (11.12): The chamber discussed the production of documents and the role of the executive extensively yesterday. I will not cover that ground again, except to note that I support the points that the Chief Minister made. I appreciate the Leader of the Opposition’s willingness to engage in the time frame for responding to this motion, and I will be moving an amendment to that effect shortly.

The government has been, and will continue to be, transparent with the community about light rail. I provided an update on the project in the last sitting and it included a time line for stage 2 vetting. I also provided the same time line last year as part of the last term of the Legislative Assembly. I am happy to continue to provide updates as we progress with that project.

With our population expected to increase to around 750,000 by mid-century, we are preparing to prevent future congestion and provide more opportunities for Canberrans to move in our city through mass transit. Light rail stage 2A provides the construction of 1.7 kilometres of new rail line from Alinga Street to Commonwealth Park, including a bridge over Parkes Way and three new stations for the city: Edinburgh Avenue, City South, and Commonwealth Park. Once complete, the new rail connection will unlock a range of benefits for the city, not only by bringing the city closer towards the lake—unlocking housing and commercial opportunities along the way—but also by providing people with better public transport options through the southern part of the city.

We have already seen some investments from the private sector and significant announcements about the opportunities that they are taking to invest in and around the extension of the line. At this stage, construction is due to be complete in 2027, and that is in the contract that has been published on the Contracts Register. Light rail services will connect Gungahlin and North Canberra to City West, the ANU, New Acton, Commonwealth Park and Lake Burley Griffin, with operations expected to commence around quarter 1 of 2028.

As construction progresses for stage 2A, so does the planning and design work for stage 2B to continue light rail through to Woden. Our current focus, as I have mentioned, is on the environmental impact statement process under the commonwealth’s Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act. The ACT government officially submitted the draft EIS to the commonwealth and territory environmental agencies in December 2024, and the project team is now actively working through feedback from both agencies on the draft EIS prior to public exhibition.

Similar to the extensive community consultation process that we conducted last year, public exhibition on the draft EIS will invite Canberrans to have their say on the design and considerations, such as light rail stops, active travel, landscaping, heritage matters, and opportunities to improve the public realm and general amenity across the five stage 2B precincts: Commonwealth Avenue, Parliament House, Inner South, Yarra Glen and Woden. We anticipate public exhibition will occur around the middle of this year, and I look forward to updating the community and the Assembly on this next stage of engagement soon.

We support today’s motion. I will move an amendment to reflect a realistic time frame

for the production of the documents, and I would appreciate the support of the Assembly. Whilst we agree on and can discuss matters of process, we clearly disagree with the opposition in relation to the merits of light rail in Canberra. They did not support light rail stage 1. They did not support light rail stage 2A. Then they said they supported it, and then they did not support it again, and now it looks like they continue to not support stage 2A. And, of course, they do not support stage 2B, which will deliver significant benefits for the city. The Canberra Liberals would not provide the expansion to light rail which is needed to support our growing city. Election after election has shown that Canberrans support light rail and want it to be expanded.

We will continue to engage in good faith with the standing order process for producing the documents called for in this motion, and we will continue to be transparent, as we have been at each stage of the light rail projects—for example, by publishing business cases for stage 1 and stage 2A. I expect we will do the same for stage 2B once that business case is developed. It has not been at this point because we are going through the approval stage and design of the project before we move to development and consideration of a business case for the project.

I move the amendment circulated in my name:

After paragraph (5), add new paragraph:

“(6) notwithstanding provisions of standing order 213A, material is to be provided within 30 days.”.

MR BRADDOCK (Yerrabi) (11.17): The Greens will support the 213A motion moved by Ms Castley, and also the amendment moved by Mr Steel.

As mentioned yesterday, the Greens do not expect the government to create a document when information does not yet exist. For example, it is impossible for the ACT government to create, within the next 30 days, a business case when design decisions may not yet have been made, such as the exact route, which would have significant implications in terms of the financial cost that is being estimated. Also, detailed engineering studies may not yet be completed or approval conditions from the federal government may not yet be known. But, where this information does exist, the Greens are supportive of it being provided in the interest of transparency.

I note the level of financial justification for light rail projects sought by this particular motion far exceeds the financial justification information provided for other major transport projects across the ACT. The Greens have repeatedly sought such financial justification for business cases and other documents for major road projects that are in the order of hundreds of millions of dollars of expenditure out of the ACT budget. I hope that all parties in the Assembly have a similar appetite for the transparency of the financial justification for those major road projects and that all parties would support a similar motion seeking transparency on the exact financial justification, because, as Ms Castley said, it is important to ensure that said projects provide value for money for the people of Canberra.

MS CARRICK (Murrumbidgee) (11.19): I support Ms Castley’s motion and Mr Steel’s amendment. To undertake our role as the opposition and the crossbench in

a democracy, we need the information to be able to do our job, which is to scrutinise decisions made by the executive and hold them to account. With the ACT budget under severe pressure, it is critical to have full transparency about all significant expenditure, including roads. We need to see the business cases that make the case for light rail stage 2, the indicative costs and the cost-benefit analysis. We need to see the full cost of the project to date, including the raising of London Circuit. Without this information, informed decisions are not possible.

In response to a recent question on notice regarding costs for light rail stage 2A, I was provided with a link to a document that contains no cost information whatsoever. The government needs to be transparent about the justification and cost of all major expenditure items. Its longstanding resistance to do so in relation to stage 2 of light rail breeds mistrust in the community and underlying support for the project.

MR EMERSON (Kurrajong) (11.20): I am supporting Ms Castley's motion today. A high-quality public transport network is absolutely needed to better the lives of current and future generations of Canberrans, and it is critical in fighting traffic congestion, avoiding open sprawl, reducing carbon emissions and addressing transport poverty across our community.

I believe light rail has been of significant benefit to people who have been able to access it, and I am supportive in principle of its extension to increase the equitable spread of those benefits across our community. That does not mean light rail should not be exposed to the same level of scrutiny as any other major infrastructure project, with a strong commitment to extensive and open community consultation. Indeed, given the scale of investment in this project, it should be exposed to the greatest level of scrutiny of all infrastructure projects on the government's agenda. We have already seen serious concerns raised about the government's apparent allergy to transparency in some areas—a seasonal allergy at a minimum. Transparency and accountability are the cornerstones of strong democracy, and, although I do not stand with the opposition in opposition to light rail, that does not diminish my support for their calls for more transparency and accountability around its implementation.

Given the immense pressure on the territory's budget and the number of important measures we are not investing in because we are told we cannot afford to, Canberrans deserve an ongoing evidence based assurance that the rollout of light rail is justifiable. This motion offers the government an opportunity to start providing that assurance.

The government would benefit from being forthright with Canberrans by demonstrating that they want their plans to be scrutinised openly. It is incumbent upon all members of this Assembly, regardless of party alliance, to help build public trust in public institutions. For that reason, I support this motion, and I look forward to being enlightened by the documents it produces or, perhaps, does not produce.

Amendment agreed to.

Question, as amended, resolved in the affirmative.

Appropriation Bill 2024-2025 (No 2)

Debate resumed from 6 February 2025 on motion by **Mr Steel**:

That this bill be agreed to in principle.

MS CASTLEY (Yerrabi—Leader of the Opposition) (11.23): In September last year, the health minister's office was contacted by the CEO of Canberra Health Services. This contact was unusual. Not only did it come in the middle of an election campaign when the government was officially in caretaker mode and just before pre-poll voting was to begin; that contact was also unusual because it conveyed a critically important message that a caretaker minister needed to know—that Canberra Health Services, which operates our health and hospital services, was facing demand well above their forecasts and, consequently, the solvency of the system was at risk.

It was proven by the appropriation we are debating today, which provides an additional \$300 million for the health system. Told about the surge in demand and aware of the risks that it poses for the community, who rely on the health system, who did the minister and her office tell? No-one. And what did the minister and her office do? Nothing. Two weeks out from the election—an election in which health was clearly an issue of importance to many voters—Labor chose to keep this secret. They could have disclosed this issue and enabled the community to probe and understand what has happened. They could have enabled a policy debate about how to respond to the demand and cost pressures on the health system before the election. Instead, Labor made the politically-convenient choice and stayed silent until the election had come and gone. This was a decision that completely lacked honesty, integrity and transparency. I cannot believe anyone thought it was appropriate and that nobody has taken responsibility for misleading the community. This is not how things should work in the ACT. It is far from the only thing that falls well short of community expectations.

The government's forecasting ability is also a real concern. For some years, we have seen persistent errors in budget forecasts. They have been noted by the opposition, by Pegasus, which has prepared reviews of the budget as part of the estimates process, by S&P Global, the government's credit rating agency, and by commentators such as former Labor Chief Minister Jon Stanhope. Persistent forecast errors are a huge problem. Not only do they mislead about the government's fiscal position and the direction of spending and revenue changes in the future but also impede proper, long-term decision-making in the public sector. It is surprising that the government does not see this as a problem.

While errors naturally occur in forecasts from time to time, they are not normally persistent, and they are not normally biased in one particular direction, as we see in the ACT. We do not see the same problems in forecasts from commonwealth or state treasuries. Indeed, I imagine it would be a source of shame and they would seek assistance from academics, interstate colleagues or independent experts to review their forecasting methodology. I do not know why this has not already occurred in the ACT. But I am particularly concerned that forecasting errors have seemingly spread from the Treasury to ACT Health.

While I accept that forecasting health demand is not easy, missing demand growth in such a way that requires CHS to be recapitalised by \$300 million is quite a miss. It is telling that the government does not seem to think any official or agency should bear

responsibility for an error of this magnitude. In the private sector and in other governments, this would be cause for heads to roll, but in the ACT mistakes are ignored or they are covered up.

Our community deserves better than this. The community deserves a government which is honest and accountable about its mistakes—a government with real drive to perform, improve and be effective for the community, not a government that makes mistakes, hides them from community and takes no responsibility for its actions or failures.

We will support this Appropriation Bill because we do need to recapitalise the health system. Canberra's patients have already suffered enough under this minister. They are the ones who would bear the cost of this bill if this bill were not agreed. That is not our goal, but we believe the government needs to be held to account. We need more transparency about spending, and we need better forecasting, because Canberrans deserve better than what they are getting from this government.

MR RATTENBURY (Kurrajong) (11.28): I rise today to speak in support of Appropriation Bill 2024-2025 (No 2). The ACT Greens will support the bill today. However, I wish to use this opportunity to continue to express a number of concerns regarding the unanticipated costs in the health system.

Health care is one of the most important services for people in our community. It is a service that is fundamental in allowing people to live good lives, and, for this reason, the ACT Greens will always stand up for our healthcare services, ensuring that they are timely, affordable and universally accessible. From the initial announcement of an additional 85,000 incidents of health care to the inquiry into the bill and now, the ACT Greens have been actively trying to understand the root cause of the significant increase in the number of health services. We must be able to understand these to ensure that we continue to strengthen our healthcare system and be able to provide services to Canberrans in a financially sustainable way. Despite the inquiry into this bill, the Assembly still does not have an answer to what has caused the increase in demand for health services. To me, the most crucial line in the Standing Committee on Public Accounts and Administration report was:

The Committee was concerned that the Government was not able to provide sufficient detail on what is driving the trends in demands for health services.

It is a significant concern that the government does not have an explanation for what is driving the trends in demand for health services. It is the central and crucial question in relation to this appropriation bill, and yet we still do not have answers to this question. Given the importance of quality health care to Canberrans, whilst it is important that this Assembly passes the \$332 million required for the health system, we also need to be able to understand the factors driving it. This simply cannot be a \$332 million bandaid for the health system.

The inquiry was able to understand the \$332 million of unplanned expenditure in the health budget as being caused by three main factors: the increased need for staffing; accounting for money from the National Health Reform Agreement that was not there, based on a flawed commonwealth system; and, finally, the unprecedented increase in acute medical presentations.

I want to talk about each of these in turn, as we need to have an open and transparent conversation with the community about how to more sustainably manage the health budget going forward, whilst also delivering better services. Also, we need the government to further investigate each of these factors so that we may be able to better service our health system and avoid future significant increases in presentations.

Firstly, the inquiry found that 80 per cent of the current overspend is for supplementary staffing to respond to this increase in activity: agency nursing, visiting medical officers and locums. In recent annual reports hearings, we asked whether the ACT's continued reliance on visiting medical officers and locums presents the most economically efficient model of employment. Unfortunately, no modelling that had been done on the best model for staffing arrangements could be provided. I recognise that the minister has flagged a desire for reform in this area, and we support that. Clearly, we work in an environment where skill shortages in the health sector are a reality and workforce demands are high, but the use of temporary staff is evidently not the most cost-effective approach. The Greens support efforts to ensure more staff are working in permanent positions.

The second reason for this appropriation bill stems from the expectation that there would be an additional \$105 million available through commonwealth funding as a result of the 6.5 per cent soft cap. If there were funding available under the national funding cap, states and territories may be able to access additional funding; however, the assumption that this would be available did not pay off. My federal colleagues have been actively advocating for the removal of the arbitrary 6.5 per cent cap on funding growth. They have also been calling for the principle of a 50-50 funding split between all state and territory public hospitals and the federal government. They understand the importance of also advocating for these issues up on the hill to fund the public health care our community needs and ensure that we have well-resourced local public hospitals. I hope that Labor might also be more ambitious in this space, given that it is their colleagues who can make these changes right now.

Finally, we need to continue to discuss why there has been an additional 85,000 presentations until the point that was reported. We have also heard that we expect there will be an additional unanticipated 100,000 presentations over the entire financial year. In a small territory like Canberra, this is a significant increase in relation to our population size. However, it is also a significant increase when considering that the number of presentations at Canberra's emergency departments grew by eight per cent compared to the national average of 0.4 per cent.

We also note that the number of people presenting to the emergency department who have a primary GP has significantly decreased in the last few years. In 2021-22, 99 per cent of people who presented to the emergency department had a general practitioner that they could list, and in 2023-24 only 90 per cent of people had such a contact. People in our community are putting off GP visits. People in our community are not even attending GP clinics due to costs and the increasing unavailability of viable bulk-billed options.

Even the health minister is in "furious agreement" that access to GPs in the community and access to bulk-billing is a problem and that it is creating pressure on our tertiary

system. However, we hear again and again that this is solely a federal issue. It is not looking like a federal issue right now, because we know that people not being able to access regular preventative care and affordable care has contributed to the problem that the ACT is now facing. It is a problem that is now leading to the need for an unplanned supplementary appropriation, so at some point we might want to start playing a more active role in thinking about how a similar chunk of money might be spent so that we are not having this conversation next year.

Yesterday, in question time, I asked the minister whether the ACT government was assessing the benefits of increased spending on primary or preventative health care versus acute care. In response, the minister said:

This was part of the conversation that we had in the hearings during the committee inquiry. I recognised then, as I am happy to do now, that Canberrans' lack of access to affordable primary care is probably one of the drivers—but not the only driver—of increased demand for hospital and other acute services and other public health services. But, as Mr Rattenbury is well aware, primary care is not the primary responsibility of the ACT government.

I thank the minister for the explanation. I can reassure her that I am well aware of that, but I am also seeking to invigorate some consideration of whether that answer is enough. My view is that it is not. With the ACT facing a \$332 million blowout in our health budget, we need to expressly consider what role the territory government wants to play in preventative health care. On paper, it may be the commonwealth's responsibility, but the cold, hard reality is that the failure of the commonwealth to adequately invest means the ACT is being left to pick up the tab. What we do not seem to be able to get an answer to is how to best respond.

I also asked the minister yesterday whether the government has any modelling regarding return on investment and cost-benefit analyses for increased funding in preventative health care and the potential for increased spending in primary health to prevent the requirement of future supplementary appropriation bills. When we are facing a \$332 million health budget blowout, surely there is a moment to stop and wonder whether it might be better to invest in some more preventative and primary care. Even if, on paper, it is the commonwealth's job, given we now have a \$332 million shortfall, might it be cheaper for us to invest in some of these services ourselves? That is certainly the view the Greens hold. That is why our election commitments focused so heavily on primary and preventative care.

As the Greens emphasised, we urgently need to rethink how we deal with the health services in Canberra. This includes a focus on providing more preventative primary health care, including initiatives such as government support for bulk-billing doctor clinics. In recognising that the ACT has the lowest rate of bulk-billing GPs in Australia, during the most recent election campaign the ACT Greens advocated for the establishment of four fully bulk-billed GP clinics. These clinics would offer all services typically provided by a GP; however, the cost of administration and infrastructure would be managed by the government. This would allow for any registered GPs to work at the clinic and bulk-bill all patients. Best of all, our model would have ensured more than 160,000 bulk-billed appointments for Canberrans each year.

But it was not just bulk-billing we spoke of. Even though that gets all of the headlines,

we understand that there is more to the story. That is why we also spoke of improved care and access for people with chronic conditions, who are frequent users of health services. We committed to a range of mental health service improvements to enable improved early access to care. It is interesting to reflect now that, during post-election discussions, the Labor Party was insistent that there was no space left in the budget for these sorts of ideas, and yet we now find ourselves with a \$332 million hole in the budget that we are funding here today.

The bottom line is this: the Greens are supporting this supplementary appropriation bill today. It is clear the money is needed, and we are pleased that the health system has been able to step up and address this demand. Also, we express our concern at the issues that have been raised by this appropriation and express a clear need for further work. We need a greater consideration by the ACT government of alternative approaches. We need the commonwealth to step up to the plate and provide a better deal for states and territories. What we do not need is different levels of government looking at each other for answers or trying to shift the blame onto each other, especially when both of those governments are led by the Labor Party.

MS CARRICK (Murrumbidgee) (11.39): I rise to talk about the budget and the supplementary appropriation bill. I speak in my role as an independent member for Murrumbidgee, not as the Deputy Chair of the Public Accounts and Administration Committee.

I am new to the ACT budget framework, however, I have found it frustrating to navigate due to the difficulty in finding meaningful financial information about the actual spend against budgets because of the following reasons: the appropriations are set at the directorate level; the budget outlook does not have budgeted financial statements and a good split of revenue and expenses, but that is the last you see of those expenses.

The directorate budgets are at output level. These outputs are scattered over the directorate's documents, and it is time consuming to find the information. It would be handy to have one document with all the outcomes. The quarterly reports are sets of financial statements with no notes to explain the figures, and there is a table of expenditure against budgets at the very high directorate level. There are quarterly dashboards which provide high level activity and comparisons to the same period the year before and that would be good if it was broken down to a lower level. Annual reports provide actuals and variances against the budgeted outcomes. There needs to be simpler reporting against activities to monitor and manage the pressures on the budget.

The main output in the Health Directorate is at a very high level: 1.1 for acute services, being \$1.7 billion. The directorate manages this output at a lower level of detail and alerts Treasury if there are any concerns. Reporting at this high level makes it very difficult for oversight of where pressures are emerging in the budget. To get more meaningful information, it would be best to track expenditure and report variances to budget against the general government sector expenses by function, shown on page 285 of the 2024-25 budget outlook.

The appropriation bill is for \$388 million, with health receiving \$330 million to keep the health system going. This is important because health funding was expected to run out on 7 May this year. In addition, \$24 million is for the Community Services

Directorate for out of home care, \$20 million to the chief minister's directorate for a central funding pool, nearly \$10 million for the Justice and Safety Directorate for police salaries, and nearly \$4 million for more Treasurer's advance.

Interestingly, this is a story about cash flow problems due to the poor budget forecasting in health services, because, of the \$330 million appropriated for health, \$159 million has already been provided to Canberra Health Services earlier this year: \$80 million from the ACT Health Directorate, which will be reimbursed to them through the new money in the bill, and \$79 million from the Treasurer's advance, which will be returned to the Treasurer from the \$250 million appropriation to the Local Hospital Network.

The primary reason for the additional requirement for health funding was the increase in demand for services of around 85,000 additional patients, which required supplementary staffing, including agency nursing, visiting medical officers and locums. The increase in demand from the opening of new capacity at the emergency building at Canberra Hospital does not appear to be factored into the budgets and increases in daily activity apparently did not trigger discussions about the impact on costs and the available budget funding. Because there was no monthly reporting in July and August 2024, and there was a lag in receiving invoices, the extent of the problem was not known until after the quarterly report and the election. The increasing activity did not lead to consideration about the impact on the forward estimates in the budget. The minister has said she needs to work out how to manage it. I assume that means how they will reduce costs so it does not increase the deficit, debt and interest payments in the forward estimates by an alarming amount.

This leads to doubts about the current budget forecasts, particularly the surpluses that are shown in 2026-27 and 2027-28 in the budget review released in February 2025. Trends in demand for health services should have been forecast, given that the Canberra Health Services had already borrowed \$80 million from the Health Directorate and \$79 million from the Treasurer's advance. It is not good for people to doubt the robustness of the underpinning assumptions of the budget numbers. The government needs to provide better reporting around the budget for the opposition and the crossbench to be able to do their job in the Assembly, to scrutinise decisions and hold the government to account. We need reports that show the expected demand and the actual demand with variance explanations more regularly; forward estimates that include forecasts of expenditure for our health service for additional health demand; and explanations of the underpinning assumptions behind the budget estimates.

The additional appropriations have led to an increase in the deficit to almost \$1 billion. From the 2024-25 budget, the deficit has increased from \$624 million to \$972 million, a huge 56 per cent increase. This is leading to increasing debt and interest payments. By 2027-28, the territory borrowings will be \$19.8 billion, and the interest expense will be \$886 million. While the government says that it aims for a balanced budget, it has not achieved surpluses for many years. Debt is being used for both assets and day-to-day cash flow requirements for the directorates. An interest expense of \$886 million is very large. It is a very large amount of money when services such as respite care at Burrangiri are being closed and we cannot get replacement social infrastructure in our area.

While the government believes that young people should also contribute to paying off

the debt in the future because they are using the hospital, inequality also comes from the lack of investment in our community sector and the lost opportunity for investment in social infrastructure and services now, to provide places for us to meet and to be active, which is good for physical and mental health. We want these places to give us a sense of belonging to our community for the children that live in our area now. That is better than spending hundreds of millions of dollars on interest.

While I believe there is a lack of transparency in explaining the underpinning assumptions of the budget forecasts and in the reporting of health services activity, I believe the directorate and the Treasury are better at forecasting trends in health activity than they let us know. They knew that the budget was not going to be enough for the year, and I am sure that they know that the forecasts on current trends are also too low in the future years. Notwithstanding this, we need to ensure health services continue to be delivered for the rest of the 2024-25 financial year.

MS CLAY (Ginninderra) (11.46): I rise today to speak in support of the proposed Appropriation Bill 2024-25 (No 2), and echo the sentiments shared by Mr Rattenbury. Whilst it is important that we pass this bill to ensure the continuation of crucial health services for Canberrans, I also wish to discuss the ongoing concerns that this budget overrun could have been foreseen.

As my colleague, Mr Rattenbury, outlined, we need to start thinking about spending in the health system in a smarter way, whether this is increasing funding for preventative care and considering the savings, both economically and socially, for Canberrans through preventing increases in acute demand, or whether it is providing well thought out modelling on potential savings through different models of staffing, or whether it is some other solution.

But this \$387 million appropriation bill follows a trend of other ACT Labor blowouts and failed projects, and all of these mean that there is less money to spend on the services that Canberrans need. Labor needs to be ensuring that lessons are applied across the system and health is one very big example of unplanned or wasted expenditure. We have heard a litany of other examples in here of projects running late, being mismanaged, or running over budget, and that is why I am not confident that Labor is learning these lessons. Let me take you through a selection of some of our recent examples. MyWay+. I will not go into details, as I am chairing an inquiry into it at the moment. I will simply note that the rollout of MyWay+ has not been smooth.

The Materials Recovery Facility. Our recycling facility burnt down in 2022. The government told us the new one would be up and running by 2025 and in the interim, we would pay to ship our recycling interstate. Now, I am supportive of the responsible decision to continue to recycle using interstate facilities in the meantime. It does generate emissions from that additional transport, but the environmental benefit in terms of recovering embedded emissions that would otherwise go to landfill, and the value of getting back those raw materials so we can keep reusing them, is really, really high. The decision makes sense, but recycling this way comes with a high financial cost. We are spending \$10 million more each year to do it than if we were sorting our recycling locally, and we are now told the facility will not be operating until 2028. So if we had run that project quicker, we would have saved \$30 million and we would have made that saving while creating local jobs and delivering a better environmental

outcome than shipping our waste around the country.

CIT. There was poor governance and the inflated contracts for system thinkers means nearly \$8 million was wasted. It has been well discussed in here before. That matter led to a finding of serious corrupt conduct; not with the government, of course, but it is nevertheless an indicator of how poorly that matter was run.

HRIMS. We have heard of almost \$80 million spent on the ACT government's planned HR information management system, and that had to be written off. Now, according to the Auditor General, that program was:

A significant failure for the Territory ... Planning for the HRIMS program was poor...Program monitoring and assurance arrangements were poor, including quality assurance, program reporting and risk management activities.

In itself, this is highly concerning because it is almost \$80 million we will never get back. That money would have been so much better spent on housing, on preventive healthcare, on the community sector, on climate and on the environment, and the only real winners seem to have been the management consultants.

Digital Health Record. The audit findings published on 13 December 2024 identify a lot of problems. There were unclear roles and responsibilities for governance committees and internal assurance functions. There was a conflict of interest between the chief information officer as chair or co-chair of the ACT Health governance committee, who was also approving work to be undertaken and marking their own homework. There was a lack of clear read-through between individual ICT projects and the overall digital health strategy. The Technology Strategy Committee suffered poor attendance and untimely provision of meeting papers between February 2020 and June 2021. Look, a lot of committees struggled to get to grips with Zoom and Teams in the early stages of the pandemic, but I would have hoped that our major Technology Strategy Committee should have been able to manage this.

The report also found that it was unclear whether the information provided allowed the members of governance committees to make informed investment decisions. While the price of the contract with NTT Australia has ballooned from \$66 million to \$110 million, the ACT Auditor General has highlighted:

that it is not possible to provide reasonable assurance that the services paid for were actually received or that the price paid for those services was the correct price.

I cannot help mentioning, yet again, that \$8 million a year, the subsidy that we give to the horseracing industry. Over the course of these MOUs, this single industry has received or been pledged over \$100 million by ACT government. Currently the horseracing industry receives more public money than the Canberra Raiders, ACT Brumbies, Canberra United, and all of our community sports programs, combined. They get this money outside of any grant process or public tender. It is a sport watched by few, and it is a source of harm for many. An ACT Labor government that again proves it is here for narrow interests rather than all Canberrans. While I am in no doubt that many in Labour do genuinely wish to be progressive, proven and practical, we are struggling to see this in the delivery of Canberra services.

These stories matter because they show that poor contract management and cost control is pervasive across government. This is not in any one area. We do not seem to be learning the lessons we need to, and it is costing Canberrans. Ahead of the last election, the two old parties started calling for a new stadium. The Greens looked at that idea and we hit pause. We were particularly surprised that the Labor government, amidst slogans that they are proven and practical financial managers, held up a billion dollar new stadium with very little work behind it. We are equally surprised at how much Labor spoke about it before the election and how little Labor has spoken about it since the election. Is that new stadium a genuine intention based on good policy work that serves an urgent Canberra need? If so, where is it up to, and if not, why bring it up before an election?

I heard from many constituents during that election and they spoke about “bread and circuses.” Canberrans are really smart. They are really well educated and they understand how these cycles are run. A lot of them are now confused that Labor appears to have run out of money for basic services. Given that Labor, according to what we have heard in here many times, knew about the increased demand in health services and presumably the cost implications of this, why were we hearing about new projects then?

Here in the ACT at this point in time, we need to be choosing good projects and then we need really good project management to deliver on those. We should not have so many of them running over time, running over budget, or being cancelled altogether due to mismanagement. Either our system is under-resourced in terms of the public servants needed to deliver it, and if that is the case, that is a false economy with major multimillion dollar projects, or our governance and management is not performing its role. We need to conduct good modelling before committing to major expenditure.

We need economists or financial managers to track expenditure, model our need and look at the cost of services and whether we are delivering on what we said we would. We should be doing that not simply for projects and programs that address acute and crisis needs, but we should also be doing that as a baseline for preventative measures. We need to compare. We all know prevention is cheaper than cure, and it gives better results, but we are not delivering that through our government services. Often we are not even considering it.

Where we have taken a really good look at preventative measures, they work for people, and they provide better value for government. For instance, in the justice space, we set a goal to reduce recidivism by 25 per cent. The Greens drove those calls because we do not believe in building more and more prisons. We would rather tackle the social and economic problems that lead to the need for prisons. Good programs and state interventions at an earlier stage will get better results for the community and for potential offenders, than simply allowing problems and behaviours to escalate. We are now seeing the proof of that. We are seeing great results from that approach.

One of the programs to deliver on justice reinvestment was the Drug and Alcohol Sentencing List. The economic assessment of it estimated that up to \$14 million in cost savings were made for the ACT government in avoided prison time. That intervention program got better results for the people directly involved, and it got better results for the community, and it saved us money. Look, it is common sense. Everybody knows

that prevention works better than cure, and everybody knows that prevention is cheaper than waiting for a problem to get worse and then running a crisis intervention, but if we are not measuring it and modelling it, governments and policy makers will not take that as a serious alternative.

We know we are not always doing that measuring and modelling. We are not modelling prevention versus emergency measures in healthcare, for instance. We know this from yesterday's answers in parliament. Government was unable to answer how many health economists ACT government has, so they have taken that on notice. The minister did say that the government is not considering modelling on preventative healthcare versus the acute spending dealt with by this appropriation. I find that deeply concerning given the costs we are experiencing, and the complaints about our healthcare. It does look like we need a new approach. We have had the same approach for a decade, and it is not addressing core problems and now it is leading to serious cost overruns. At the core of this issue is ensuring that we can most effectively provide quality services, essential services that make Canberrans' lives better. It is now the right time to step back and look at how we can most effectively provide this.

Debate (on motion by **Ms Tough**) adjourned to a later hour.

Sitting suspended from 11.56 to 2.00 pm.

Questions without notice

Transport Canberra—electric buses—procurement

MS CASTLEY: My question is to the Minister for Transport. Is the minister aware that as many as 106 Yutong electric buses used in the ACT rely on the CATL batteries, the manufacture of which the New South Wales Anti-slavery Commissioner has linked to Uyghur forced labour camps?

MR STEEL: I thank the member for her question in relation to the buses that we have procured from Yutong. We have not received all 106 electric buses. We have a contract for 90 that have been purchased and then a contract by way of lease for 12 Yutong buses. So, to correct the member's question, the remainder are with a different company.

Of course, through a procurement process based on a change that I made when I was the previous minister responsible for procurement, the Ethical Treatment of Workers Evaluation, to address modern slavery issues, we consider those issues as part of procurements that the ACT government undertakes at the time. I will come back on notice as to whether those issues were considered in the procurement for these buses. I have to remind myself of the exact timing of that.

But, no, I had not been previously aware of that up until just recently. Transport Canberra are looking at that at the moment to see what the issues are that have been brought to our attention. I note that, in relation to the Ethical Treatment of Workers Evaluation process, it is intended that, if those issues are raised, they should be considered through the process outlined when we made those changes to the instrument. I think it was last year.

MS CASTLEY: Minister, do you share the concerns of Transport Canberra passengers who are uncomfortable travelling on vehicles that were produced, in part, with slave labour? If so, can you inform the Assembly what you intend to do about it?

MR STEEL: I thank the member for her question. I do not think those have been verified at this point in time. I think the process that Transport Canberra is undertaking is to seek verification about those claims that have been made. But there is, of course, a process for those claims to be made to the ACT government for consideration in future procurements as well.

MR COCKS: Minister, what due diligence steps did you undertake personally on the acquisition of vehicles produced, in part, with slave labour?

MR STEEL: I thank the member for his question. As he well knows, procurement activities are undertaken at arms-length from ministers, and that is right and proper. We have set up a process through the Ethical Treatment of Workers Evaluation to be able to consider ethical issues associated with potential government procurement of goods and services. That has, of course, been considered through that process since that was established. I will come back to the Assembly as to the process that was gone through, whether it occurred prior to that being established, and any further information that I can provide in relation to the buses. I am happy to provide an update to the Assembly.

Transport Canberra—electric buses—procurement

MS CASTLEY: My question is to the Minister for Transport. Is the minister aware that Sydney based bus manufacturer Custom Denning could be forced to shut down, in part because governments like the ACT chose to procure vehicles from Yutong buses, the manufacturer which may have relied on slave labour? Minister, what happens to the four defective buses that the ACT leased from Custom Denning if the manufacturer shuts down?

MR STEEL: I thank the member for her question. I did see that article where concerns were raised by Custom Denning in relation to their ongoing viability. The New South Wales government has made a commitment in that space, as well, to support them. I do want to point out, though, that we were criticised by the opposition for actually undertaking a lease with Custom Denning to supply us with buses to test them out to see whether these were going to be a useful product for Transport Canberra's network. We were criticised by the opposition when there were reliability issues with those Custom Denning buses running on our network, because they were not delivering some of the specifications that had been set out. So you cannot have it both ways. You cannot criticise us both for leasing them and for not buying more.

Ms Castley: On a point of order—I believe the minister is debating. I simply asked a question; if he could be more relevant to the question.

MR SPEAKER: Minister, is it possible for you to be more relevant to the question?

MR STEEL: I will continue on, because there is more I can provide. As I mentioned in the answer to the earlier question, procurement processes are undertaken at arm's length from ministers. It is not the minister choosing which particular supplier we want

to go with. We undertake procurement activities, particularly when we are going out for large procurement for buses, at arm's length and in accordance with the Government Procurement Act, the probity principles in the act and the probity guide. That is right and proper and that is what has occurred in relation to the procurement of the Yutong buses. We went out to seek a supplier for a large number of buses and we arrived at a contract with a particular supplier for 90 buses.

MS CASTLEY: Minister, what other companies could you possibly have used other than a Chinese supplier which has been linked to slave labour?

MR STEEL: I thank the member for her question. I note that it is actually VDI Australia that we have a contract with. I understand that at the moment the manufacturing of those buses is occurring in China, but I also understand that VDI has future plans to undertake more work in Australia as well. We will obviously find out as we go out for further procurements about what other suppliers are available in the Australian market. This is a new technology that has only been emerging over the last few years. A range of established suppliers has only just been able to produce electric buses for the first time. I suspect what we will find when we go out for procurement in the future is that there will be more suppliers to be able to purchase buses from than there were previously, and that is a very good thing and will enhance competition in the tender process. But I will not be making the decision, as the minister, on which supplier we go with. There will be a proper tender evaluation process undertaken at arm's length, by the government, in relation to that, if we go out for the purchase of more buses in the future, as is right, proper and consistent with the Government Procurement Act and probity principles.

MR CAIN: Minister, how much has the ACT government paid Custom Denning, both for the leased vehicles and any enabling infrastructure, and how much use have these vehicles seen?

MR STEEL: I thank the member for his question. That requires a very specific answer, so I will come back on notice with some further information about that. As I mentioned before—and previously to the Assembly in a ministerial statement—there have been some issues experienced with the Custom Denning buses, and that is something we have sought to have resolved with the supplier. Some of those buses were taken offline for a period of time for some of those technical issues to be addressed by the supplier. They own the buses under the lease agreement, which is, as I understand it, for around five years, so it is in their interest to fix those. Of course, in future procurements we will seek to go out to market for, potentially, the purchase of new buses. We also have an existing contract in place with Yutong, as well as options available should we wish to exercise them. We will use the best intelligence at that time to inform the best approach to market.

Transport Canberra—MyWay+

MR BRADDOCK: My question is to the Minister for Transport. Minister, during question time yesterday you stated that to date there had been no breaches in the MyWay+ system and explained the cyber security testing on the MyWay+ system by an entity you described as “a nation- and international-leading cyber security firm” prior to its public release. Minister, why—after the system went live, and after this testing by

a nation- and international-leading cyber security firm—was a first-year ANU computer sciences student able to access Canberrans’ personal and payment information on the MyWay+ system?

MR STEEL: As I mentioned yesterday, Transport Canberra was proactive in identifying a cybersecurity risk by engaging CyberCX in September 2024, prior to go-live, to perform a security threat and risk assessment. Vulnerability disclosures were later received by third parties, but in investigating these reports the vulnerabilities were already known to Transport Canberra and the ACT Cyber Security Centre, and were either resolved or were being properly addressed. NEC Australia has verified that all vulnerabilities in the disclosures have been resolved.

I have been advised, in relation to the Fulham and Reid reports on personal information, which were referenced in the *Canberra Times* today, that Mr Fulham did not raise the issues discussed in today’s *Canberra Times* article or in his submission to the inquiry with Transport Canberra through the MyWay+ community-based testing program or otherwise. Transport Canberra has taken action to corroborate Mr Fulham’s observations and others raised in submissions to the inquiry, to determine if they have previously been identified. For observations which are new or unique, the MyWay+ project team will undertake a risk assessment to prioritise potential vulnerabilities and address accordingly.

I have also been advised that at this stage Transport Canberra believes that observations identified in Fulham’s report are neither new nor not previously addressed, so I have directed TCCS to provide me with advice on the matters raised by Mr Fulham and Mr Reid.

MR BRADDOCK: How can the government say there was no breach, when a member of the public gained access to Canberrans’ personal and banking information?

MR STEEL: I am seeking some further information in relation to Mr Fulham’s claims. As I mentioned in my previous answer, I have asked Transport Canberra to undertake action to corroborate those observations. But, as I have also been advised, Transport Canberra believes that observations identified in Mr Fulham’s report are neither new nor not previously addressed.

MR RATTENBURY: Minister, are you suggesting that a member of the public gaining access to Canberrans’ personal and payment information does not constitute a breach?

MR STEEL: I thank the member for his question. Vulnerability disclosures are treated very seriously by the ACT government, and we are treating it as such. A breach is a further step. At this stage, that has not been identified, and we have been very clear about that, but we will, of course, investigate any disclosures that have been made about vulnerabilities in the system to get a better understanding about that. But the advice from Transport Canberra is also that the vulnerabilities that have been identified, and which are already known, have been resolved.

Health—primary health care

MS TOUGH: My question is to the Minister for Health. Minister, recently the

Albanese Labor government announced a commitment of \$8.3 billion to support increased access to bulk-billing. How will these measures complement the ACT government's existing investment in primary care?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I thank Ms Tough for the question. Affordable access to primary care is and always will be a Labor priority. It supports the ACT government's approach to integrated health care. We absolutely welcome the Albanese Labor government's recent commitment of \$8½ billion in Medicare funding—the single largest investment in Medicare since its creation more than 40 years ago. That builds on the \$3½ billion in additional bulk-billing incentives that have already been provided since the Albanese government came to office. This investment will increase bulk billing, with the aim that nine out of 10 visits to general practitioners will have no out-of-pocket cost by 2030 across Australia. It will also support 400 nursing scholarships and 2,000 new GP trainees a year. The commonwealth commitment includes over \$600 million in investments to deliver more doctors in general practice through increased GP training, salary incentives and commonwealth supported places for medical students. This is exactly where it intersects with ACT Labor government policy.

This commitment will complement the work that is currently underway between us and the Australian government to implement testing of the Primary Care Pilot, which is an innovative model to support more than 400 patients with complex needs, with free access to primary care. There is support from specialists as well who are working to reduce demand on our emergency departments. But it will also support the investments in delivering primary care that we already make for some of the most vulnerable people in our community, including more than \$2 million this year for a range of accessible private health services for 12- to 25-year-olds and delivering primary health services through the “Chat to PAT” mobile health clinic, through the \$765,000 Delivering Better Care initiative, in partnership with Directions. By comparing, Canberrans know only Labor governments support Medicare.

MS TOUGH: Minister, does the ACT Labor government have any additional plans to support Canberrans to access affordable and high-quality primary care?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I thank Ms Tough for the supplementary question. Labor was, of course, the only party to take a genuinely comprehensive health plan to the election in 2024. A key pillar of the government's plan was to build on our existing investments in primary care and to build on the Albanese Labor government's existing tripling of bulk-billing incentives to encourage more general practice bulk-billing in the ACT. We made a number of priority commitments at last year's election. This included establishing an \$11 million fund to encourage more bulk-billing through financial support for new bulk-billing general practices to open in the ACT and for existing bulk-billing practices to expand. This could be things like supporting construction, refurbishment and expansion of physical facilities, particularly for general practices that support the bulk-billing of children and young people. This fund will be developed in consultation with the Capital Health Network, GPs and practice owners to ensure that it genuinely provides meaningful support. It may include, as well as capital infrastructure, things like multidisciplinary staff services and support for integrated care arrangements, building on the Primary Care Pilot.

We are also committed to a \$4 million Professional Development and Wellbeing Fund for primary care. This will serve to attract GP registrars in the ACT by supporting the wellbeing of the primary care workforce and creating opportunities for GP and other primary care professionals to participate in research, education and professional development. That sits alongside the commitments that we made—things like general practice diagnosis and prescribing for ADHD, which is something GPs have been advocating for, and supporting that with access to professional development. We are also reviewing after-hours access to primary care and will be supporting more bulk-billing for after-hours care as well.

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: Minister, are you aware of any alternative approaches to health system investment?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I thank Mr Werner-Gibbings for the question. I am aware of some alternative approaches, but, unfortunately, all we have heard from the Leader of the Opposition is ongoing denigration of the ACT health system, including claims about the viability of walk-in centres—that they do not really do very much—and criticism of reforms around patient-led care. We know that, if the Canberra Liberals had won the last election—

Mr Cocks: Mr Speaker, a point of order: the minister has moved into debating the question by taking a view on what the Leader of the Opposition's policy might be.

MR SPEAKER: Mr Cocks, I do not think there is a point of order. The question was about alternative approaches to health and she is covering—

Ms Castley: What do I have to do with that?

Members interjecting—

MR SPEAKER: Minister, would you like to continue?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I think this is right: there really was no alternative. The opposition took until right at the end of the campaign to commit to the new north-side hospital. What we have seen them commit to—and they are still committed to it, of course—is spending at least \$12 million on a royal commission, which would take years and probably come up with exactly the same recommendations we have seen before, and that would not add anything to actually delivering improvements in our health system. Over the last few years under this government, we have seen significant improvements in emergency department performance.

We are also committed, of course, to continuing to deliver our comprehensive plan that is delivering results. I note that the President of the AMA stated in their annual *Public hospital report card* that these policies gave her reason to be optimistic about the future and that our improved performance is encouraging. I believe she would not have been able to say the same thing about those opposite.

Canberra Health Services—orthopaedic surgery

MS CASTLEY: My question is to the Minister for Health.

On 11 March 2025, you told ABC Radio that “Orthopaedic surgeons were basically keeping their own list of people they wanted to see, their patients, that is not visible to the system.” It is my understanding this list is nothing more than a Google doc used by orthopaedic surgeons to track cases, equipment required and patient details. Given you were responsible for the \$160 million blowout of DHR, why was this list not incorporated into the platform?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I think that question is a question for the orthopaedic surgeons who have chosen to use a different methodology to keep track of their cases. The point I was making, and the point that I will make again—and this was a conversation I explicitly had with them—is if the system cannot see your list, and you are using that list and not looking at what is happening in the wider system, how can we expect to deliver integrated patient-centred care. So my only point was to encourage the orthopaedic surgical group to work with the integrated operations centre—the clue is in the name: integrated operations centre—to share information and to increase transparency, so that everybody could see the same information and, thereby, share that information and make decisions around prioritisation for patients, so that patients are being seen according to priority and waits.

MS CASTLEY: Minister, were you aware that the orthopaedic surgeons sought to have this information in a Google doc included in DHR and, despite the cost blowing out from \$213 million to \$378 million, were told that it was not possible—with your fancy system! A Google doc to help them do their job!

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: If I understand what Ms Castley is saying correctly, they wanted to have a Google doc incorporated in an electronic medical records system. That actually makes no sense. That actually makes no sense at all. So I do not understand the question that Ms Castley is asking, because what she is asking is, “Could we incorporate a Google doc in an electronic medical records system that everybody else across the entire Canberra Health Service is using?” It is ridiculous!

MS MORRIS: Minister, why have you criticised surgeons for tracking this information when you refused to include it in the DHR?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I reject the premise of the question. I do not believe we have refused to include this information in the electronic medical records system that we know as DHR. What I understand to be the case is that this particular group of surgeons has chosen to hold their information in a different way to others—

Ms Castley interjecting—

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: and maybe that is because they are not comfortable with the digital health record system, maybe that is the case. I am not going to speak for them in that regard. My sole point, and I think it is a pretty reasonable one, is let us all get on the same page; let us all share information. If they want to keep their information in a Google doc: fine, but share that information with other people so that everybody has the same information and people can collaborate on decision-making.

Canberra Hospital—training accreditation

MS CASTLEY: My question is to the Minister for Health.

How will the recent changes to personnel at the Canberra Hospital impact current and future training accreditation, given we have previously lost—and had warnings about losing—our accreditation in some levels of some programs?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: It is interesting that Ms Castley puts it as “in some levels of some programs”. Of course, the orthopaedic team did lose last year their accreditation for supporting PGY1 and 2 interns and residents. The team that Ms Castley is standing up and arguing for actually lost their accreditation through the Canberra Region Medical Education Council for supporting our most junior doctors through their training.

Now we have worked very closely—and Canberra Health Services has worked very closely—with the orthopaedics team to ensure that that accreditation is retained, and Canberra Health Services is continuing to work very closely with the orthopaedics team leadership to ensure that accredited college training can also continue at Canberra Hospital. We know that Canberra Hospital is one of the best places to train as an orthopaedic surgeon, and that is because Canberra Hospital is one of a few hospitals around the country that see a really broad mix of both trauma and elective procedures. It is a very good place to be an orthopaedic surgeon, and that is why I am very confident that we will have no difficulty in retaining a strong orthopaedic team at Canberra Hospital.

MS CASTLEY: Minister, what impact does the loss of training accreditation have on the ongoing enrolment of junior doctors in the ACT?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: We have not lost training accreditation, and I have no reason to expect that we will. Yet again, all we see from the Leader of the Opposition is scaremongering and talking down our health system. That is all we ever see from Ms Castley.

MR HANSON: Minister, could you provide the Assembly with the status of the accreditation of all of the training programs in your portfolio and any risks we face to maintaining that accreditation?

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

Planning and development—Kambah

MISS NUTTALL: My question is to the Minister for Planning and Sustainable Development.

Minister, I refer you to your response to my question taken on notice in annual reports about any community consultation you did before you listed block 24, section 286 Kambah for development applications. Your response indicates that, while you consulted broader strategic plans like the ILRP and a community needs assessment from the Molonglo Valley, you did not in fact undertake a community needs assessment for the Kambah block, despite urging from the community and myself. Minister, on what

basis can you be confident that the use of this block as a community activity centre meets community need in Kambah if you have not asked them?

MR STEEL: I thank the member for her question. The purpose of the two-stage expression of interest process is to find out which organisations may wish to utilise the land that has been specified—in this case, around six blocks that were identified that were already zoned for community facilities use. So the government was not specifying any change to the zoning of the blocks. But we were interested in hearing from a range of different community groups about what they would like to potentially use that block for. That is currently still under assessment, and we look forward to seeing what those activities are. We have gone out to the community to ask them what they want and to community organisations that may have an interest in the use of that site. That is the purpose of the process that we are going through right now.

More broadly, the ACT government, through the Environment, Planning and Sustainable Development, is undertaking a broader community needs assessment than the Molonglo Valley one that you mentioned to get a better understanding of what the broader needs are. But, ultimately, the real test is whether an organisation is willing to take on a block of land and do something with it. That is exactly what we are testing through this process—what is viable for a community organisation and what proposals they have for the government to consider.

It is a relatively new process. It is one that I think will get a better outcome from the community than the previous one, where the expression of interest process did not exist. There was simply a direct sales process to the next person, the next organisation, on the list. I do not think that would achieve the best outcome for the community. That is why we changed it to an expression of interest process where all community organisations with an interest in those blocks and doing something for the community could come forward and that would be assessed on its merits.

MISS NUTTALL: Minister, was this expression of interest factoring in that the land would be sold as market value?

MR STEEL: I thank the member for her question, and I will come back to her with the specifics around the blocks. There were some specific needs that were addressed on some of the blocks that were different as part of the round 6 that we put out as part of the expression of interest process. I am happy to come back to her with some information. But what I would refer her to more broadly are the provisions under the Planning Act for the direct sale of land for both concessional and non-concessional purposes.

MS CLAY: Minister, did you conduct a dedicated community needs assessment for the blocks in Gowrie and Chisholm that were released at the same time?

MR STEEL: There was a similar process, where we have gone out to the community with an expression of interest to find out which community organisations would like to do something community-based with that land. That process is underway and will be assessed by the Environment, Planning and Sustainable Development Directorate at arm's length, as is appropriate.

Transport Canberra—bus frequency

MS CARRICK: My question is to the Minister for Transport. Yesterday you announced much needed extra services for the R10, 66 and 47 bus routes from the Molonglo Valley. You also claimed that additional services on the R4 route would increase capacity on the Cotter Road. The inner south represents the second largest employment district in the ACT, with significant employment growth expected as the National Security Office Precinct in Barton is developed. At present, there are no direct bus services from Molonglo Valley or Weston Creek to anywhere in the inner south, making public transport an unattractive option for commuters.

When will direct bus services be introduced between the rapidly growing Molonglo Valley district and Canberra's second largest employment district in the inner south, and Fyshwick, to provide viable public transport options that would help reduce traffic congestion on the Cotter Road at peak times?

MR STEEL: I thank the member for her question. I will take it as a comment and an expression of interest in the new bus service. We, through Transport Canberra, review the bus network and timetable on an annual basis, taking into account community feedback. I will find out whether they have received feedback in relation to that specific request you have made, Ms Carrick.

We have, as you have mentioned, made a significant uplift in the term 2 timetable for this year, which will certainly benefit a range of different districts across the city, with the efficiencies going through the opening of the Woden depot. Of course, there may be room for, potentially, other improvements, as time goes on, that we will need to assess on a case-by-case basis.

There are a range of local routes that service the inner south in addition to the rapid routes. One of the issues with the rapid routes that run on Adelaide Avenue and come from the Cotter Road, including the R7 and R10, is that there are no stops in the inner south between the bottom of Curtin and Albert Hall, and that is exactly what we are trying to address with light rail stage 2 to Woden—by actually providing stops for the first time in the inner south close to the major employment hub that supports 40,000 workers and more to come, potentially, if the Labor government is re-elected federally. Light rail will provide those opportunities, and there will be great connection points established that were not possible before, integrated with the rest of the bus network, when we have light rail stage 2 operational. I can certainly see the opportunity for people to connect with the light rail system to get access to those stops in the inner south—it will run on State Circle and service all of those suburbs around it, whether it is Forrest, whether it is Red Hill, whether it is Barton and, indeed, Parkes.

MS CARRICK: Is the government considering a rapid service connecting Woden, Molonglo and Belconnen town centres, increasing capacity and journey options across the region, including to Canberra Hospital?

MR STEEL: I thank the member for her question. As I outlined in my ministerial statement at the start of the term, as minister for transport, ACT Labor took a range of election commitments forward. They are the priorities that we have outlined in terms of both service uplift—frequency of existing services—and additional rapids. The

current focus is supporting the growth areas of the city such as West Belconnen, Ginninderry, Molonglo—looking at whether we can introduce another rapid there, once the new bridge is completed. We will also be looking at some further local bus routes as well, as the new suburbs of Bandler and Sulman are established in the future. Then, of course, we are looking at a new rapid from Tuggeranong as well, as far down as Lanyon through to the city. We will be doing some further consultation and planning for that over the term. There are a range of services that we have outlined; they are the priorities, but of course community feedback will help to inform broader network changes, if necessary, based on demand and need, and balancing other service priorities across the network.

MS CASTLEY: Minister, when will real-time bus departure information be restored to screens at bus interchanges, given it has not been available since September 2024 and is fundamental to ensuring the use of these new routes?

MR STEEL: I thank the member for her question. I am happy to come back on notice with more detail about the information on bus timings on the displays that is available at some of the interchanges. There has been considerable testing to date that has been undertaken in relation to rolling out that customer information. I will provide some further information on notice. We have taken feedback from the community as well, about the format and design of those displays, and I think there have been some positive changes as we have continued to roll those out. But those have been rolled out at a later time than the go-live date, and I will provide an update to the Assembly on how that is going.

Law and justice—age of criminal responsibility

MR EMERSON: My question is to the Minister for Children, Youth and Families. We are hearing a lot about youth crime. I have spoken before about the need for targeted wrap-around supports to address the root causes of this issue. I do not believe that incarceration is the solution. The age of criminal responsibility is set to be raised to 14 in a few months' time—an important step to break cycles of incarceration and put our young people on a better path—but I am hearing from concerned committee members that the government is not doing anywhere near enough to create those better pathways.

Yes, the Therapeutic Support Panel was established last year, but there is huge unmet need in our community that shows we are not even close to doing enough in this space. Canberra PCYC has a waitlist of close to 500 children who are not receiving the urgent support needed to keep them out of the criminal justice system, because PCYC lacks sufficient funding. Minister, what new actions has the government taken to support 13- and 14-year-old children who will soon be diverted out of the criminal justice system? Where exactly will they be diverted to?

MR PETTERSSON: I would like to thank Mr Emerson for the question. To the very specific question at the end: for young people in that age cohort, we have stood up the Therapeutic Support Panel to provide comprehensive support to that cohort. That is not the only program that exists in the ACT to support young people that are at risk or are engaged with the youth justice system.

There are a range of entities that assist young people that are at risk. I will go through some of them. There is the youth justice case management team within CYF; the Changing Habits and Reaching Targets program; the intensive adolescent services team, and the Therapeutic Support Panel, which has been previously mentioned. A range of youth justice community residential services that exist. Of course there is the very new Changing Lane Safer Youth Driving program as well as the Functional Family Therapy youth justice program. There are a range of programs that exist; it is not just the Therapeutic Support Panel. It is, of course, an important part of that mix, but it is not the only component of it.

MR EMERSON: Will the minister commit to providing sufficient funding in the upcoming budget to address PCYC's waitlist to ensure that the almost-500 children currently waiting—and that almost matches the number of children who receive support from PCYC—actually get the support they need?

MR PETTERSSON: I thank Mr Emerson for his supplementary question. As I am sure he appreciates, I am not in a position to announce executive policy or speak to budget outcomes. I appreciate his advocacy. Like him, as a member of this place I have interacted with PCYC, and I am aware of the good work they do in the community. I am aware of their advocacy on certain issues. I thank them for the work they do in the community. It is a wonderful thing that they do, and I look forward to continued work with them.

Freestanding birth centre—feasibility study

MS CLAY: My question is to the Minister for Health. Canberra's women and birthing people have been campaigning for a freestanding birth centre for decades. In 2023, I tabled petitions with over 3,000 signatures seeking a freestanding birth centre. I was delighted the Assembly agreed to this community-led proposal for a freestanding birth centre. The ACT government has agreed to complete a feasibility study for a co-designed and midwife-led facility in 2024. I understand that the feasibility study and consultation are now complete. When will you release the feasibility report and the consultation feedback?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I thank Ms Clay for the question. I expect to be briefed on that work shortly. I have committed to publicly releasing that. I cannot put a time frame on that today, but I expect it will be quite soon.

MS CLAY: Has the government made a commitment that the design of the facility will be midwife-led?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: It would certainly be my intention that it would be a midwife-led service and that the design of the facility would be very much a midwife-led activity. But, of course, it also needs to meet requirements like the Australasian Health Facility Guidelines, so it will not only be midwives designing the architecture for this facility; it will need to be a multidisciplinary approach. We also need to engage consumers and carers in that conversation. As a midwife-led service, midwives would be at the forefront of the work to design the facility.

MISS NUTTALL: Minister, what are the next steps and time frames for this project?

I appreciate that you might not be able to answer that today.

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I thank Miss Nuttall for the understanding. We very specifically committed, in response to Ms Clay's motion, to this work being done in the context of the new north-side hospital. What we actually committed to was looking at different models of birth centres, from alongside a hospital to completely freestanding, either on the hospital campus or in a different location. That is what this first phase of the work has been looking at. In the context of it being part of the new north-side hospital project, our intention is that this work would be done by the end of the decade—roughly, 2030 or 2031. However, that is not ruling out that we may end up delivering the birth centre before that. But it has been very clear the whole way through that this was committed to as part of the new north-side hospital project.

Transport Canberra—MyWay+

MR BRADDOCK: My question is for the Minister for Transport. With respect to MyWay+ cybersecurity, is the ACT government able to identify which Canberrans had their personal and payment information accessed in an unauthorised way by a member of the public?

MR STEEL: I thank the member for his question. I just want to clarify that Mr Fulham's report was a responsible disclosure to the Australian Cyber Security Centre on Friday, 6 December 2024. These vulnerabilities were addressed by a software update implemented over the weekend of 7 and 8 December of the same year. There was no breach, and the advice that has been provided to me is that Mr Fulham did not access personal information or secure financial information of anyone else's data. He accessed his own personal information data and secure financial data and theorised that others could also access it. So that was identified through that process and addressed, and the advice from Transport Canberra is that there has been no breach of personal identifiable information.

MR BRADDOCK: Is the ACT government satisfied that Mr Fulham was the only instance where Canberrans' personal and payment information was accessed in an unauthorised way by a member of the public?

MR STEEL: I reject the premise of the question and refer the member to the answer given to the previous question.

MR RATTENBURY: How can the ACT government be confident then that no-one else did access that data?

MR STEEL: The advice to me is that there has been no breach and, as I have stated to the Assembly, when there are responsible disclosures made to the territory, they are taken very seriously. The issues are identified and corroborated to see whether that same issue is presenting, particularly to our cybersecurity centre in the ACT government, particularly the Digital, Data and Technology Solutions in CMTEDD. If there is a vulnerability that is corroborated, then that vulnerability is closed down. That is exactly what occurred in relation to the disclosure that had been made to the ACT on Friday, 6 December and those vulnerabilities were addressed on 7 and 8 December.

I want to reiterate that—in relation to any system across government, whether it be MyWay+ or another digital system—we welcome vulnerable disclosures from the public. There is a culture in the cybersecurity sector of vulnerable disclosures, and it is a good thing because the sector is going around identifying where there may be vulnerabilities in other people's systems and they are letting the operators and vendors associated with those systems know so that they can close down those vulnerabilities to threat actors. The advice continues to be that there has been no breach and there is very proactive work that has been done to address any vulnerability disclosures that have come to the ACT government or through the Australian Cyber Security Centre.

Public schools—funding

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: My question is to the minister for education.

Minister, I understand that the ACT government recently signed an updated funding agreement for ACT public schools. Can you please explain what this funding agreement will mean for ACT public schools?

MS BERRY: I thank Mr Werner-Gibbings for his question. The updated funding agreement will mean that ACT public schools will benefit from around an additional \$293 million over 10 years through the Australian government's Better and Fairer Schools Agreement - Full and Fair Funding 2025-2034. The Better and Fairer Schools Agreement secures ongoing Australian government funding for ACT public schools over 10 years, increasing from 20 per cent of the school resourcing standard to 25 per cent.

The additional funding will support key ACT government election commitments including the implementation of Strong Foundations, expanding flexible education offerings, recruiting additional mental health workers, and investing in principal health and wellbeing in ACT public schools. This funding builds on the ACT government's already strong investment in public education.

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: Minister, can you please explain how this funding will be used in ACT public schools?

MS BERRY: This additional funding is linked to agreed activities under the three national reform directions of equity and excellence, wellbeing for learning and engagement, and a strong and sustainable workforce. Some of the key actions that are being progressed include phonics and numeracy checks, literacy and numeracy coaches, and curriculum resources to support teachers in their roles. Another important action focuses on principal health and wellbeing programs and workload reduction initiatives for teachers and school leaders so that they can focus on teaching. These actions build on reforms already underway in ACT public schools, such as strengthening the inclusion of students with disability and making sure that we have efficient and aligned allied health services to support our schools.

MS TOUGH: Minister, what is some of the work that is already underway this year that will be ready for implementation in ACT public schools in 2026?

MS BERRY: I thank Ms Tough for that supplementary. Work is underway this year

on scoping and design of several initiatives for implementation from the next year. Some of this work includes continuing the work of schools, their local communities and service providers in meeting the wellbeing and learning needs of ACT public school students. This will include exploring access to community coordinators and mental health workers as well as multidisciplinary services, and implementing new approaches to continue to address bullying and respond to students with complex behaviours in ACT public schools. In addition, the work will also include ways to expand flexible education offerings so ACT public school students from all backgrounds who need additional support to engage with learning can thrive at school.

Budget—deficit

MR COCKS: My question is to the Treasurer. Treasurer, around \$100 million of your budget review's 56 per cent increase in the ACT deficit stems from the ACT government's risky assumption that New South Wales and Victoria would not spend their full allocation of commonwealth funding. How does the government justify gambling with the ACT's finances by relying on commonwealth funding that was allocated to other jurisdictions?

MR STEEL: I thank the member for his question. I think it is a misunderstanding of the National Health Reform Agreement. The reality is that we have not been able to strike a five-year National Health Reform Agreement with the commonwealth that was anticipated in previous budgets. We would have hoped that there would be further funding beyond the one-year agreement that we have been able to secure. But, of course, we will continue to negotiate with the commonwealth in relation to those arrangements.

We are not the only jurisdiction that assumed that we would receive a certain amount from the commonwealth based on the structure of the National Health Reform Agreement and what might come forward in the future in further agreements. Other jurisdictions also made the same assumption. I believe Tasmania was one of those and also had a similar technical adjustment that was made in their budget as well.

We will, of course, continue to engage with the commonwealth about making sure that we get from them their fair share of a contribution to our acute hospital system and our local hospital network. We have \$1.7 billion that has been put on the table by the commonwealth to support the one-year agreement, which is certainly welcome. But we look forward to putting in place longer-term arrangements.

We also know that the reality with the National Health Reform Agreement is that there are a range of different mechanisms in place to cap commonwealth funding, a soft cap on activity of 6.5 per cent but also an efficient price that is built into that system that has not reflected the extent of cost increases experienced by our LHN and, indeed, other LHNs around the country. These are things that we are actively discussing with the commonwealth, and that will continue as part of negotiations on a five-year agreement.

MR COCKS: Treasurer, what contingency plans, if any, did the government put in place before the election to ensure financial stability if those assumptions about the federal government's allocation of funding did not come to fruition?

MR STEEL: We continue to look at the budget context every year and make decisions about how we address our broader fiscal strategy. We will continue to do that in relation to the healthcare pressure that has been experienced this year and of course any further decisions that are made about future funding agreements with the commonwealth. But we hope to strike a—

Mr Cocks: I have a point of order on relevance. The scope of the question was very specifically around the period before the election.

MR SPEAKER: Mr Steel, I am of the view that it was a fairly specific question from Mr Cocks and, to this point, your answer has been quite broad. I am going to ask you, if you can, to—

MR STEEL: I am happy to finish.

MR SPEAKER: Mr Steel, are you saying that your answer is finished?

MR STEEL: Yes; thank you.

MR CAIN: Treasurer, why do the forward estimates in your budget review continue to incorporate assumptions you already know are wrong?

MR STEEL: I thank the member for his question. As I mentioned before, we will continue to make decisions in the budget based on the best information that is available to Treasury and make any technical adjustments that are required to reflect the best figures that we can in terms of what is provided over the forward estimates for both healthcare expenditure and also what we expect to receive in relation to any commonwealth grants under a range of different federal financial agreements, including the NHRA.

Taxation—revoked duty exemptions

MR COCKS: My question is to the Minister for Finance. The ACT government has significantly increased the amount of revenue recovered through reassessed and revoked homebuyer concession duty exemptions. Revenue jumped from \$99,797 in 2021-22 to \$962,289 in 2022-23 and has already hit \$8.2 million in 2023-24.

Minister, why has the amount of homebuyer concession duty reassessments skyrocketed almost tenfold in two years?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I thank Mr Cocks for the question. One of the things that we have talked about—and I am sure that we talked about this in the hearings as well—is that Revenue Office staff were transferred to other work during the COVID-19 pandemic and have now come back to work assessing whether there are debts owed to the Revenue Office. Also, as we discussed during the hearings, specifically in relation to homebuyer concession reassessments, there is a notice to the individuals nine months after that concession is claimed that it cannot be fully assessed until 12 months after that concession has been claimed because part of the requirement for those homebuyer duty concessions is that the person is living in the home for more than 12 months. The actual question that Mr Cocks asked is largely around the additional effort in the

Revenue Office now to pursue debts that are owed to the ACT government, on behalf of ACT taxpayers.

MR COCKS: Has the government undertaken any formal review of the effectiveness and impacts of the self-assessment approach for homebuyer concessions that has led to so many revocations?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I do not think I have got the numbers on me—but when Mr Cocks talks about “so many”, it is actually a very small proportion of homebuyer concession scheme holders that have been reassessed. There are millions and millions of dollars worth of homebuyer concessions that are granted, and I will take on notice and I will provide back to Mr Cocks the proportion that are reassessed as not being eligible. But it is, in fact, a very small proportion that are reassessed as not being eligible.

In terms of Mr Cocks’s question about self-assessment, this is how many, many—in fact, most—tax systems work. Anybody who has ever completed a tax return will know that the way the tax office works is that you do a self-assessment. And largely that is taken on the basis that you have signed a declaration saying that the information you have provided is true and correct. And you know when you submit that assessment, when you submit that return, that it may be audited and it may be reviewed, and if you have incorrectly claimed a concession, the tax office will come back to you. If they think that you should pay a penalty, they will charge you a penalty, and if they think you need to pay interest, you will be charged interest for that. Everybody who has ever completed a tax return should understand that that is the way it works.

MS CASTLEY: Minister, is the government aware of any instances where the self-assessment tools may have provided an incorrect assessment?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: There is a self-assessment tool for the homebuyer concession scheme on the ACT Revenue Office website; that is a useful tool. But there is also a very clear statement on that website that advises anybody who is applying for a homebuyer concession to also seek legal advice. And, of course, people are also free to call the Revenue Office and talk through their information. It is also available to people to pay their stamp duty up-front and then to apply for the concession and get that concession if they are eligible for it. So, yes, it is a self-assessed scheme, like most tax lines are.

Ms Castley: A point of order on relevance. I did not ask what the safeguards were; I asked if the minister was aware whether the self-assessment tool itself has provided incorrect assessments. She did not answer that question at all.

MR SPEAKER: Minister, I do not know if you have any more? Thank you.

Members interjecting—

Disability—Disability Reform Taskforce

MS BARRY: My question is to the Minister for Disability, Carers and Community Services. Given the importance your government attaches to the disability reform

taskforce, as a response to the disability royal commission, why has the government now scrapped the taskforce?

MS ORR: I thank Ms Barry for her question. The government has not scrapped the taskforce. I believe Ms Barry has pulled this question from a line of inquiry that came up in a hearing when I was not present; it was Minister Pettersson with the Director-General of CSD there, who took the question and provided an answer. I might say that perhaps it was not the most clear answer, and has not come across in the way that was intended, but my understanding is that the Director-General of CSD has written to the committee to clarify the circumstances. I can assure Miss Barry, and everyone else listening, that the reform taskforce is very much stood up and operational.

MS BARRY: I have not seen that, but I will ask the next question. Why hasn't the government consulted or even announced the sacking of the taskforce to the stakeholders and the sector?

MS ORR: I refer the member to my previous answer.

Planning—Hawker group centre

MR CAIN: My question is to the Minister for Planning and Sustainable Development. Minister, in the last sitting period you updated the Assembly on the Woolworths Group's direct sale application for public land at the Hawker Group Centre, saying you encouraged Woolworths to revise their proposal, preferably with shop-top apartments. Why is Woolworths Group getting special treatment for a direct sale? And why doesn't the government consider selling the block by public tender?

MR STEEL: They are not getting special treatment. I reject the premise of the question in that regard. There is a process set out under the Planning Act for proponents to come forward in relation to the purchase of land. There has historically always been a provision around contiguous land, particularly as it allows for potential shopping centre expansion and so forth. Woolworths Group obviously have an existing interest in the shops and have come forward for purchase of land there. It is open to the government, in considering a direct sale, to look at a different option, which may be a competitive sale. I note that occurred in relation to the Kippax Group Centre. Ultimately, the government has gone back to the original proponent of that, because that process did not achieve the outcome that was desired. That delayed the process, but the work is continuing, which is great.

I also want to clarify the question that EPSDD has written to Woolworths in relation to this matter. The direct sale process is at an early stage and we are not quite at the point of being able to undertake the further stage of consideration of that, because it has not met the requirements of the government, as determined by EPSDD. So there is potentially opportunity in the future to look at a revised application, if they wish to provide one. Indeed, it is open to the government to take a different approach if that does not meet the planning needs of the territory.

MR CAIN: Minister, what specific steps will the government take if Woolworths do not revise their proposal to include housing? And what is the time line for any revision?

MR STEEL: I refer the member to the Planning Act 2023, which outlines the process of direct land sales—

Mr Cain: Mr Speaker, a point of order: that is such a dismissive response. He is here to answer questions.

MR SPEAKER: Mr Cain, could you be seated. The minister is trying to answer your question.

Mr Cain: Don't tell me to go to the act. Answer the question.

MR STEEL: The process is outlined in the act for direct sales. We will be complying with that. As I said, it is at a very early stage of consideration, so the question is actually talking about a hypothetical: what might occur in the future, when a revised proposal has not yet been provided by the proponent. Should a revised application be provided, EPSDD will assess that carefully, including consideration of whether a direct sale is the most appropriate way to sell the land, and will provide advice to government. We will consider that advice at the time it is given.

MS CASTLEY: What feedback has the government received from the Hawker community regarding the inclusion of shop-top apartments in the redevelopment proposal?

MR STEEL: No redevelopment proposal with shop-top apartments has been provided by the proponent.

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

Supplementary answers to questions without notice Health—primary health care

MS CLAY: Mr Speaker, through you: earlier I think I heard the health minister say that federal Labor has announced the Medicare rebate would be tripled. I am very sorry if I have misquoted. I think that is what I heard. The media release on the Medicare incentive says the rebates have increased by 62 per cent for standard consultations in metro areas, and the increases are much less in other areas. I just want to make sure we get the right information on the record. We have a lot of confusion about health spending at the moment.

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I may have used rebate instead of incentives. The bulk-billing incentive has been tripled for children and young people and for concession card holders. What federal Labor has announced is that the incentive would be tripled for all people who are bulk billed.

Pest control—termites

MS CHEYNE: Mr Speaker, on termites, the answers are if it is on TCCS land, City Services approves and covers the cost for destroying a termite mound that is within 60 metres of a property, but they may need to negotiate on price with the pest controller. In line with ACT government procurement policy, a quotation and approval are

required prior to the purchasing of any goods or services, and value for money is paramount. Termites are not declared pests in the ACT, and City Services does not seek and destroy termite mounds on TCCS managed land. However, if a termite mound is reported to City Services and it is within 60 metres of a residence, City Services will have it destroyed.

Regarding the review of the policy, City Services engages external expertise within the private pest control industry to carry out termite inspections and treatments on public land. The consultation process that has been underway since 3 March has been aimed at those current firms who are registered with City Services and who regularly undertake these inspections and treatments on behalf of City Services, and the resident or client that they are representing.

A banner was added, which I referenced yesterday, so that residents, if they were interested, could also participate in the consultation, and that remains the case. Consultation remains open until 30 March.

Libraries ACT—resourcing

MR BRADDOCK (Yerrabi) (3.08): I move:

That this Assembly:

(1) notes that:

- (a) the ACT Council of Social Service (ACTCOSS) submission to the *Libraries ACT: Imagine 2030* consultation (2021) stated that public libraries are essential community infrastructure that support social justice, and called for a policy framework and investment model for the long-term provision of community facilities;
- (b) Libraries ACT's most recent strategic plan was released in 2015, 10 years ago;
- (c) in March 2019, the Government response to the Assembly committee inquiry into ACT Libraries stated that the ACT Government was developing a "new strategic plan for the coming three to five years";
- (d) in November 2022, the ACT Government released a listening report which stated that the co-designed strategic plan would be released in 2023;
- (e) in August 2024, in response to a question on notice during Budget Estimates 2024-25, the Minister for City Services stated that Transport Canberra and City Services would propose a new libraries strategic plan to the incoming government; and
- (f) Libraries ACT has been operating without a strategic plan since the previous plan expired in 2019;

(2) further notes that:

- (a) ACT Government consultation on the Molonglo Valley library (2024) heard from the community that:
 - (i) borrowing and returning books is the main reason most respondents visit libraries;

- (ii) convenience of borrowing, reservations and returns (both during and after opening hours) is crucial to people's choice to visit libraries; and
 - (iii) most respondents want longer library opening hours;
 - (b) accountability indicators "physical visits" and "items borrowed per capita" were removed from the 2023-2024 Transport Canberra and City Services annual report, since the 2023-2024 Budget;
 - (c) an internal survey found 61 percent of library staff expressed feelings of burnout;
 - (d) Libraries ACT has engaged casual workers in response to ad hoc branch closures caused by unplanned staff leave;
 - (e) the Australian Public Library Alliance (APLA) and the Australian Library and Information Association (ALIA) (2021) recommend a minimum of:
 - (i) 64 opening hours per week for populations of 100,000 or more; and
 - (ii) 0.8 full-time equivalent (FTE) staff per 3,000 residents for populations of 250,000 or more;
 - (f) average opening hours for ACT libraries is 44.8 hours per week; and
 - (g) based on an ACT population of 474,132 (June 2024) and staffing FTE of 92.46 (January 2025), Libraries ACT employs 0.585 FTE per 3,000 residents; and
- (3) calls on the ACT Government to:
- (a) update the Assembly by the April sitting period on the release timeline for the co-designed Libraries ACT strategic plan;
 - (b) ensure library accountability indicators reflect community expectations of their most important functions;
 - (c) resource Libraries ACT sufficiently to meet APLA and ALIA standard minimums of:
 - (i) 64 average opening hours per week across the ACT; and
 - (ii) 0.8 FTE per 3,000 ACT residents;
 - (d) maintain minimum staffing for libraries at January 2025 levels (92.46 FTE), and increase floor and front-facing staffing levels in accordance with population growth; and
 - (e) prioritise hiring library staff on a permanent, full-time or part-time basis over casual employment.

"If information is the currency of democracy, then libraries are the banks." This quote by Wendell Ford sums up the essential nature of libraries in modern society. The impact is often profound: stirring imaginations, opening doorways to new possibilities and worlds, and inspiring the young and the young at heart. I am sure everyone here has a personal anecdote about libraries. I invite members to share their stories here today.

I will always recall the libraries from my childhood. To the despair of my mother, I was not a big reader as a young child, yet she persisted in regularly taking me to a library to borrow books for the next fortnight. I still remember that library, packed with bookshelves during an age that pre-dated the internet, and, if there were any computers,

they were locked away in the back office for staff. Without fail, I would select as many *Asterix* comics as I could find and convince my mother to let me borrow. Fortunately, for the sake of both my mother and me, I eventually learnt to love reading. My local library inevitably introduced me to a plethora of authors, genres and styles.

The ACT Council of Social Services has highlighted how public libraries are essential community infrastructure that supports social justice and provides a range of services to the community. These include free access to information resources, internet and computer access, and programs for children and language learners. They include free and low-cost meeting rooms and community spaces for groups to gather.

Libraries have come a long way since our youth. They are a welcoming, inclusive and safe space for everyone, including people with high and complex needs, and people who are likely to experience discrimination. They serve a range of people, such as culturally- and linguistically-diverse communities, LGBTIQ communities and new parents. They are one of the last remaining third spaces providing free access to recreation, respite, protection from extreme weather, and amenities such as accessible toilets. ACTCOSS has called for a clear policy framework and investment model for the long-term provision of community facilities such as our libraries.

The motion I am introducing today calls for the release of a strategy for our libraries, adequate resourcing for our libraries to meet minimum standards, and improved library staffing.

Firstly, I go to the strategic plan. Right now, Canberra libraries are not just treading water; they are also struggling to keep afloat. They have been running on empty, without strategic direction, for six years. We know our libraries need to evolve with the times. It is concerning that the last strategic plan for libraries was developed over a decade ago. Since then, there has been a shift in the form of increased digitisation and an uptake of online resources.

There was an Assembly committee inquiry into libraries in 2018. The government responded to recommendations and agreed to explore a co-designed process for the development of the next strategic plan for libraries. Almost six years on, there is not much the government has to show for this. We know consultations took place in mid-2021 to mid-22, following understandable COVID-19 related delays. A three-page listening report was released in November 2022, but since then there has unfortunately been nothing. For a service and a workplace as essential and evolving as libraries, I cannot understate the importance of strategic direction. The plan would outline to managers the priorities for making decisions. It would guide the training staff should receive to ensure they are equipped and supported in their jobs. And, crucially, it would provide clear public reference for the most important functions and goals for our public libraries and would inform government decisions around resourcing and accountability to ensure our libraries are doing what we need them to do.

This motion calls on the government to give a clear commitment to when the strategic plan will be delivered. More delays are simply unacceptable. ACT library staff and the community deserve answers and clear direction on where our libraries are headed.

Amidst all the change in a digital era, we know that the community still highly values

the human element of libraries, as found by last year's community consultation on the future of the Molonglo library. So it is confusing to me why the capability indicators of physical visits and items borrowed per capita were removed in the most recent TCCS annual report. A strategic plan would go some way to address such ambiguities. It is essential that measures of library performance reflect the community's expectations. My motion also calls for this.

I move on to minimum standards. To support this essential and irreplaceable piece of community infrastructure to play its necessary role in our society, the Australian Public Library Alliance and the Australian Library and Information Association have recommended minimum standards for opening hours and staffing. These standards are evidence based, quantitative measures to ensure best practice in our libraries.

The "calls on" in my motion are modest. They call on the government to ensure that ACT public libraries meet national minimum standards around opening hours and staffing, which we are currently well below the mark on. This will go some way to make sure our libraries are readily accessible to the public, with skilled staff members available to meet the needs of the community.

We are not there yet. There have been 14 library branch closures attributed to unplanned staff absences in the first 2½ months this year. If you review the Libraries ACT Facebook page, just in the past week you can see that the Dickson library was closed on Monday, 7 March; the Woden library was closed on Saturday, 15 March; the Tuggeranong library was closed on Friday, 14 March; the Belconnen library was closed on 13 March; and the Kippax library was closed on 12 March. All of the posts end with, "We apologise for any inconvenience."

I, for one, would like to see the library doors open and welcoming our community. Canberrans may hope to spend an afternoon in an air-conditioned local library with the kids to use the internet or borrow books, but suddenly, at short notice, they have to make plan B on how they might occupy their afternoon or how they might access this essential service.

We know that three in five respondents to an internal staff survey said they experienced feelings of burnout. We have to look out for these workers better. Library staff are essential workers. It is time we treat them as such. The role of librarians is multifaceted. These are specialised and skilled jobs. This should be recognised by providing extra support and training to ensure they are able to engage with members of the community with more complex needs. This is clearly a problem. The government has said it is yet to decide on a way forward to address this. The answer to me is clear: resource our libraries to enable them to meet community expectations and minimum standards and so that adequate staff are engaged to provide a high-level service to our community.

We want libraries that we are proud of, but this does not come for free. That is why my motion specifically calls on Libraries ACT to be resourced to meet minimum standards, have longer opening hours and have adequate staffing. We have a growing population here in Canberra, and this means our libraries have to expand their service offering so that the community continues to be provided with the essential services. Library staffing cannot remain static while the population accessing these services continues to expand. When people go to the library, it is the floor staff that they are interacting with. To

ensure resourcing goes where demand pressures are greatest, the motion specifies that staff increases, in accordance with population growth, should focus on floor and front-facing staff. I appreciate the Liberals have circulated an amendment that they will make to this particular clause, and I will talk to that later.

I move on to the final element of my motion. I would like to take this opportunity to thank Library ACT staff for the essential work they do in our community. I would like to assure them that their efforts have been noticed and appreciated by me, at the very least, and hopefully others in this chamber here today. It is a privilege to advocate on their behalf, and I would like to say thank you in the form of my final “call on” in my motion, because library staff deserve respect. The final “call on” in my motion seeks for this to be reflected in the terms of their employment. We want to ensure the vast majority of library staff are on secure and permanent employment. We recognise that, at times, a surge workforce may be important, but regular and predictable operation of libraries should not rely on a large number of casual workers. If they are so essential, they should be offered job security and leave entitlements.

I do not think there are many amongst us in this room—or this city, for that matter—who want to see our libraries struggle as they are. The Greens are committed to fighting for the longevity of libraries and the rights of library workers. This motion goes some way to calling on the government to provide clarity and commitment on the future of Canberra’s public libraries.

MISS NUTTALL (Brindabella) (3.18): I thank my colleague Mr Braddock for bringing this motion forward today. The topic of libraries is dear to my heart, not least because I used to work in a library before this gig, but also because of all that Mr Braddock mentioned. Firstly, they are places of inclusion. Everyone is welcome. When I was there, we took great pride in our libraries being places that people sleeping rough could find respite in and that were clean, comfortable and air-conditioned. We would help folk who were not confident with word processing and computers and folk trying to figure out public housing applications when English was not their first language. Personally, I got to put up the queer books display at the Dickson library for Pride month, and, can I say, it absolutely slapped!

Libraries are also one of the very few places in Canberra where people can reliably access computers for free and with assistance. They are the only places that I know of where you can print for free. In practice, we often ended up being the accessible drop-in government service. I lost count of how many folks I helped to apply for Seniors Cards or navigate government websites like Fix My Street. Libraries offer so many free programs like Giggle and Wiggle, Story Time, bilingual story time, author talks, Geri-Fit and Story Dogs, which cater to different ages, abilities, needs and interests. They are free, and they are so much fun to do and run.

This far in, and I have not even mentioned books! We are quickly seeing our information channels fragment and spiral out of control. The internet is great for so many reasons, but we are living in an age of rampant disinformation and misinformation. Access to certain information is regulated. Journals and news articles are hidden behind paywalls and rely on you having a computer with internet connections and knowing how to use one, even for the free stuff. People remove stuff from websites and you would never know unless you learned how to dig. Because

libraries are so successfully embedded in our culture, I do not think we appreciate how important it is to have access to stable, peer-reviewed information on hand. Librarians with degrees on subjects will find you the right books or, even better, they will show you how and where to look.

Speaking of hanging out, where else can you go that is free, accessible, air-conditioned and not bombarded with advertising? Maccas is out and shopping malls are out. Everything costs money these days, and, if it does not, the chances are that you are the product. We are, in case you have not noticed, in a climate crisis. We get heatwaves, we get fire seasons and we get hail. You know the line from *California Dreaming*: “You know the preacher likes the cold. He knows I’m gonna stay.” That was me looking at the torrential rain and knowing we were the perfect cosy place to wait out the storm. I joke, but the point is: libraries are a climate refuge, and some people in our community do not have an alternative. As my colleague Mr Braddock said, in essence, libraries are the perfect third space.

Aside from flapping my gums about how important libraries are—because I could go on forever—the big thing I would like to speak to on this motion is why good staffing policy and happy staff are so important. I joined Libraries ACT less than two years ago, and I distinctly remember one of our first all-staff meetings being very stony. It was just after the release of a directorate-wide staff survey which showed that library staff were, from memory, among the least satisfied with their day-to-day job. I can corroborate the figures of three in five staff experiencing burnout. They put on a brave face because they love the job, but I observed that a lot of my colleagues were actively staving off frustration and weariness, and sometimes they quit. It is not all bad news, I promise, because the other thing that stuck with me from that survey and that meeting is a message of hope. It was the fierce pride that library staff took in their ability to help people. I think we ranked near the top of TCCS for that. That is a testament to the culture that library staff and the library community built.

As a library services officer, I was encouraged to take the time to help people when they needed it: “If they do not know how to format and save a Word document, help them. If they have never used a scanner in their life”—and Lord knows I had not!—“and need to submit a signed document over email by close of business”—oh, my Lord!—“help them. If they want to sign up for a Seniors Card and they can’t get to COTA by bus, take the time to walk them through the process. Build their confidence.”

In this job, I sat on the inquiry into loneliness and social isolation. It was so affirming to hear experts say that people in customer and community-facing roles should be trained to recognise loneliness and take the time to look after people who are experiencing it. Library staff would do so, with no questions asked. Staff do so much that is not in their job description, simply because it is the right thing to do. My point is: not only do you need enough staff to achieve minimum supervision, but also, if you want libraries to be a community hub that people rely on, you need to give staff the space to have those human interactions and look after their community.

To their credit, after the survey results, directorate and Libraries management asked us what would help. I told them: “More staff to cover the branches consistently.” I am pretty sure other people told them this too. I was then asked, “What else?” That is hard, because it implies that, if we did other stuff—but did not bring in more front-facing

staff—it would take the pressure off. My opinion might not be universal. You would have to ask some of my former colleagues, and please do, but my opinion, as someone who worked at a library, is that we have to have more branch staff. I strongly suspect the only reason anyone would doubt the necessity to increase the number of floor staff, in the way Mr Braddock has suggested, is that they have not worked on the floor of a library.

As an officer in charge at the Dickson library—one of the busiest—I had to open the branch with only two people. That meant that, if one person was called off the floor or needed a bathroom break et cetera, I would be the only one on the floor. God forbid an emergency happened then. I have had to work 11-hour shifts—with dinner breaks, of course—from 9 am until 8.06 pm on a Friday, because we did not have enough staff to cover the late shift. Staff have plans, but they do it regardless.

Libraries should be places of respite for everyone, including folk who, due to life circumstances, sometimes display antisocial behaviour. I emphasise that we must have warm, dry, safe and accessible places that welcome people unconditionally when they are at a rough point in their lives. Suffice to say, as staff, it was important that we kept folk safe while experiencing a crisis, and we also had an obligation to keep all other patrons safe and settled.

I remember running a Giggle and Wiggle while one of our patrons—a genuinely lovely person—was experiencing a crisis and displaying some pretty intense antisocial behaviour. In order to handle that situation well, we needed one person to run the program for about 30 parents and 30 babies—usually, you need two—one person to make sure the patron experiencing the crisis was safe, and one person to serve and supervise the rest of the branch. If we wanted returns done and it was a busy morning, we needed a fourth person in the returns room. In this situation, no-one is shelving quickly, no-one is in the back getting administrative work done, and no-one is going on their pee break. I remember that, one day, I had to file three incident reports. In those circumstances, after an incident, which could be fairly intense, you would need to either pop off the floor to write the incident report or wait until after hours, which was rightly discouraged. We needed to get home on time, so you needed enough staff to cover you.

I belabour the point because I suspect that, when members think of libraries, they think of quiet spaces where we recommend books and delight kids. Do not get me wrong: we do that too, but it can be a battlefield out there. People come to libraries when they do not know who to ask. I would not have it any other way. I suspect that neither would the Canberra community, more broadly. But, to enable libraries to meet the needs of the community, we need healthy, happy, non-burnt-out staff who are able to take leave when they need to and trust there will be enough people rostered on to cover them.

Before I close, in the interests of collegiality and sharing staff culture, I would like to share an excellent joke from one of my former library colleagues that she sent this morning: “I tried to make up a joke about a ghost, but I couldn’t. It had plenty of spirit but no body!” I hope this Assembly chooses to have plenty of spirit and at least a little bit of body to actively support the minimum standards for the library staffing requirements recommended by national bodies. There is your wordplay! We absolutely need to increase the number of floor staff. We need to articulate a long-term vision for libraries and, while we are at it, we should show some appreciation for the breadth of

community-building that library staff do. I am so grateful to Mr Braddock for bringing forward the motion.

MR MILLIGAN (Yerrabi) (3.26): I move:

Omit all text in paragraphs (3)(c) and (d), substitute:

- “(c) conduct financial modelling to forecast the additional costs required to increase staffing levels to 0.8 FTE per 3,000 residents and report back to the Assembly by the last sitting day in May;
- (d) assess the need for services that Libraries ACT offer, including staffing requirements, and report back to the Assembly by the last sitting day in May; and”.

I would like to speak to my amendment and also the motion as a whole. I thank Mr Braddock for bringing this important motion to the Assembly as libraries play an important role in facilitating opportunities and encouraging analogue and digital literacy for all ages.

Libraries ACT offer a range of services to the Canberra community far beyond the traditional roles that libraries used to abide by: reading books and borrowing books. Libraries foster and encourage learning in all stages of life. They provide Canberrans with resources, information they need or even just a quiet place to read. A *Canberra Times* article published at the end of last year stated that more than a quarter of ACT students still perform below expectations in reading. Literacy continues to be an integral skill for students as they prepare for the workforce and make their contributions to society.

Libraries ACT foster and encourage literacy and digital literacy through multiple programs currently on offer. These include opportunities to start book clubs, hire out rooms, host exhibitions and access a home library service, just to mention a few of those services. Libraries ACT also provide services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders. They offer resources in multiple languages and run English conversation classes with the help of volunteers, and provide a vast amount of information on local services.

As Mr Braddock’s motion mentions, the most recent strategic plan for Libraries ACT was released 10 years ago, back in 2015. This plan outlined both strategic directions and the government’s objectives for Libraries ACT. In 2018, the Standing Committee on Environment and Transport and City Services led an inquiry into ACT Libraries which resulted in 14 recommendations. Two of those recommendations affected the process for developing the next strategic plan. The first recommendation called for the ACT government to consider the evidence submitted through submissions and hearings during the inquiry when developing the next strategic plan. Recommendation 12 suggested that the ACT government engage in a co-design process with the community in developing the new strategic plan for Libraries ACT. The government agreed in principle to the 12th recommendation.

In line with this, in November 2022 the ACT government released a listening report summarising the co-design process. It included feedback from over 7,000 members of the community. As Mr Braddock’s motion noted, this report indicated that the Libraries ACT Imagine 2030 strategy would be finalised and released in 2023. However, it is

now March 2025 and Libraries ACT still has no strategic plan since the expiration of the last one in 2019. I agree that it has been too long and we are overdue for a new strategic plan.

According to the most recent TCCS annual report, for 2023-24, Libraries ACT had full-time equivalent staff of 87.6 and a headcount of 101 as at 30 June 2024. I note Minister Cheyne's response to Mr Braddock's question on notice, stating that Libraries ACT no longer assesses performance against physical visits or items borrowed per capita, thus suggesting that these metrics are no longer meaningful or accurate. They do, however, highlight in-person demand for library staff and provide valuable insights into community needs. These measures are crucial in determining where staff resources should be allocated. I am concerned to read in budget statements H for 2023-24 that the two indicators in question are no longer considered applicable to Libraries ACT. Therefore I urge the ACT government to provide alternative accountability indicators that can tangibly measure the performance of library staff to understand the different levels of need for libraries and their services.

I propose an amendment to the motion to omit paragraph 3(c) and replace it with:

- “(c) conduct financial modelling to forecast the additional costs required to increase staffing levels to 0.8 FTE per 3,000 residents and report back to the Assembly by the last sitting day in May;

It is important that we understand the potential cost to increase staffing levels—which are currently at 0.5 per cent FTE, as I understand it—to 0.8. We would like to see the cost that is going to be incurred with that.

More importantly, my second amendment to this motion is to omit paragraph 3(d) and replace it with:

- (d) assess the need for services that Libraries ACT offer, including staffing requirements, and report back to the Assembly by the last sitting day in May; and”.

That is probably most important, because we need to understand where the demand is for the services that libraries offer and in which regions. There might be some regions where we need more additional staff. It is important that we get a true measure of what is actually required to meet needs.

I once again thank Mr Braddock for bringing this motion to the Assembly today. It is an important motion. Libraries provide a very important service to the community, and hopefully the proposed amendments that I put forward will get support and this important motion will be passed.

MS CHEYNE(Ginninderra—Manager of Government Business, Attorney-General, Minister for Human Rights, Minister for City and Government Services and Minister for the Night-Time Economy) (3.33): I certainly thank Mr Braddock for bringing this motion to the Assembly and for his proactive engagement with my office in the development of it. I also recognise Miss Nuttall and her firsthand experience as a library lover and as a staff member, her unique understanding of the value that libraries provide

and her advocacy in this space. That was an incredibly heartfelt speech, filled with experience and facts. I greatly appreciated the contribution and the representations that you have made in this place.

We support the motion and we will be supporting Mr Milligan's amendment, simply because that appears to be quite reasonable in the circumstances of what to put forward, and I do think that it still accords with the intent of the issues that Miss Nuttall and Mr Braddock have raised and the calls-on elsewhere in the motion. I look forward to agreeing to that and providing that by the last sitting day in May.

I want to start my contribution by thanking our Libraries ACT staff for their impassioned service to our community. As some in this place are aware, public-facing service roles are incredibly demanding. Our libraries staff work so hard to help members of our community access the resources they need to satisfy their curiosity, to expand their imagination and to learn more about the world they live in and then some—and I will expand on that shortly.

It is true that our libraries have some of the most extensive operating hours in comparison to other Australian jurisdictions, operating not only during standard hours but also on Sundays and, in some branches, later into the evening. I grew up in some pretty small towns, but something I did not once but twice a week was visit the library often with my dad. To have library availability and opening hours like we have in the ACT is something very special. But I also appreciate that it creates a burden on staff in some cases and can be difficult to maintain.

However, serving the community is what our staff pride themselves on, and it is absolutely evident in the way that they engage with and support the public. I visited all of our library branches since becoming minister, and the staff are just first-rate. They are caring, kind, responsive, proactive, diligent and knowledgeable. On a very personal note—and probably revealing too much about my home life—there was a quite extensive period last year where I was regularly frequenting the Belconnen library. Not only is it right near where I live; it is an excellent resource space. The staff are just wonderful, led by Dianne and the team. It was a particular refuge for me, because I could not work at home on weekends because my fiancé is obsessed with WWE and I cannot be in the same house as him when it is playing. That is true. That is why I was at the library. It was where I did plenty of productive work, always ably supported by the wonderful staff there. That is true right across all of the branches that I visited.

The government acknowledges the important public service that libraries provide to our community. In the past, libraries have been an important space for access to literature and exchange of knowledge. But, in line with modern society, they are evolving far beyond being repositories for books and having knowledgeable, highly-trained librarians who are experts in their field. Libraries are now vital centres of community connection that provide access to critical resources like computers, printers, scanners and quiet spaces for study, work or refuge. They also facilitate access to community services by hosting JPs and facilitating days where community sector providers set up in the library to make it easier for the community to engage with them proactively.

Many people come into contact for the first time with libraries through Giggle and Wiggle or perhaps a school holiday program. Geri-Fit is extremely popular across our

branches. You only have to look at the weekly What's On to see that they are almost always booked out, despite being free, but booked out.

On a very serious note, our Libraries ACT staff are sometimes the only human contact point a community member might have in that day. They are also relied on for services and support well outside their role description. In many cases, this is a wonderful thing; it is a reflection of the trust that is placed in libraries as safe spaces and the trust that is placed in library staff as people who are helpful, compassionate and knowledgeable. In some cases, it is because well-meaning persons refer community members to a library to seek support.

Our library staff therefore take on roles that they are not necessarily equipped for or trained in, including IT training and support, computer literacy, counselling, helping to fill out a form or to interpret a timetable—and Miss Nuttall gave more examples as well. I know firsthand that the teams at our branches always try their best to help. I acknowledge that this often means going above and beyond, including staying after hours or providing support in a way that they may not have imagined but also can expose them to particular incidents as well—and, again, Miss Nuttall gave that very helpful example.

As the way the community uses and accesses library resources continues to change, so too must the way libraries operate and the services they offer. I have relied on the input directly from staff in making the funding decision last year to increase user-friendliness at our libraries, fulfilling asks that they had heard from their users, better study desks, updated furniture, charging cables and power banks.

I want to acknowledge how disappointed and concerned the community has been with the number of unplanned closures. Our libraries are revered institutions, not least because of their accessibility and their reliability. Late notice, then, of a surprise closure can create limitations on access to social goods in addition to being frustrating or inconvenient—and, for that, I sincerely apologise to the community. But, most importantly, I want to reflect on the staff and the union support that has been provided to them, especially in the last few months.

To library staff, through you, Mr Assistant Speaker: I commit to working with you and being guided by your advice and your suggestions about how to provide predictability and certainty with our opening hours as well as the service you provide and what that looks like, together with shaping the medium- and longer-term solution. This is what I have directed to TCCS leadership. I also want to stress in this moment just how important your rights are to the enjoyment of just and favourable conditions of work, to safe and healthy working conditions and to rest, leisure and reasonable limitation of working hours and periodic holidays with pay.

I recognise Miss Nuttall's comments on resourcing. I do not want to diminish those; however, I also draw her attention to another comment she made about making incident reports and the requirement to step off the floor subject to having sufficient staff available or to do so after hours. It is a small example—and in no way am I suggesting that changing one single procedure is a solution in and of itself. However, I would say that it provided an immediate illustration to me that, in addition to resourcing, there are real opportunities to look at how we are going about things—close scrutiny of some

internal processes, some offerings, some requirements, things that are not working or do not make sense or create extra work unnecessarily or for which there is no or really limited demand—are important considerations in understanding how to reduce burnout and how to best support our staff.

To the other points of the motion, acknowledging the role that libraries play and how people engage with them continues to change requires us to also accept that how we measure the performance of libraries must also change. I can assure the Assembly that the accountability indicators are regularly assessed to ensure they remain a useful and appropriate measure of performance. We have only recently updated some of these indicators to better reflect these expectations. While we keep lots of data across many metrics, the government must decide what the best ways are to measure success for our branches and set our frontline staff up for success.

The Australian Public Library Alliance and the Australian Library and Information Association present different standards for different library types, with different governance structures, which do not necessarily result in standardised library services, as they recognise the need to respond to what is required by the local community. The standards are also a mix of aspirational targets and minimum expectations in the operations of public libraries. So, in considering the calls-on, I would acknowledge that one element of Canberra's public library ecosystem that should be considered when we look at the guidelines is that Libraries ACT is not the only provider of library services in our city. A benefit of being the capital is the location and access to our national institutions. The National Library is essentially a public library like no other, providing not only support across the country but also significant access to resources and information to the Canberra community directly. The contribution of its resources to the support of Canberra's community should not be forgotten.

Equally, too, is the contribution of our school libraries and those operating on our tertiary education campuses. I do appreciate that some libraries, like at Erindale and Gungahlin, are part of the school, while others are supported by a dedicated library. I know that students and alumni across the territory deeply appreciate their service to our community too. It is important that we acknowledge that these also exist, that they have similarly committed staff who are also operating perhaps not in the same circumstances, but similar ones, and how much we value that contribution as well.

With that, I want to assure this place, Libraries ACT staff and the broader community that I am committed to ensuring that our libraries are prepared to adapt to the future and continue to offer a reliable and excellent service to our community. I am committed to supporting our staff in getting on with the job that they love. I commend the amendment and the motion to this chamber.

MS CARRICK(Murrumbidgee) (3.46): I support Mr Braddock's motion for increased staffing at ACT libraries. Canberra's public libraries are critical community facilities that offer a broad range of services and benefits above and beyond their core business of providing access to content and information. As community living rooms, our public libraries provide spaces for people to come together and spaces for people to be safely alone. They provide spaces for programs and much-needed meeting spaces for community groups. In addition to providing better support and opportunities for our hardworking library workforce, increasing the level of staffing at ACT libraries will

allow for a wider range of programs and better after-hours access to support community groups needing meeting space.

I am pleased to hear that all speakers have expressed their support for the importance of libraries. The construction of a library for the Molonglo town centre should commence as soon as possible to provide a much-needed community space in this diverse and rapidly growing district. The Weston Creek Group Centre also needs a library. I would also like to see a social enterprise set up in the currently unused cafe space at the Woden library.

According to the Australian Library and Information Association, there is a \$2.90 return in community benefits for every dollar invested in public libraries. I therefore strongly support this motion calling for the ACT government to increase staffing for ACT libraries.

MR EMERSON (Kurrajong) (3.48): I thank Mr Braddock for bringing this important matter before the Assembly. I too have been contacted by multiple community members with frustrations about library opening hours and about unplanned closures which they have only discovered after having travelled to the library using public transport. Often a day is planned around a trip to the library and to arrive, having scheduled the trip to line up with limited public transport services, only to discover the library is closed, clearly, is not good enough.

I am glad to see a strong mandate in this Assembly to investigate this matter and bring this important offering for our community up to scratch. However, given what I said earlier about transparency around light rail costs and what I will say later about the government's financial management skills, I will be supporting Mr Milligan's amendment to the motion. As much as I would like to support Mr Braddock's motion unamended, I do think it is prudent to know beforehand the cost of doing so.

Thank you, Mr Milligan, for moving this sensible amendment and, again, I thank Mr Braddock for bringing this matter to our attention on behalf of community members, who I know often feel ignored and forgotten by government decision-making processes.

MS TOUGH (Brindabella) (3.49): I am taking the opportunity that Mr Braddock suggested and sharing my experience of libraries. I grew up in and around libraries. My mum is a librarian. She has worked in public libraries, a retirement village library and a library attached to a public hospital, assisting medical professionals and uni students to do research. I have seen the whole gamut of what libraries can offer in different settings. So I am really supportive of anything that happens to improve our libraries. Libraries are a wonderful place. As pretty much everyone has said, they are a safe place where you can just exist. You can learn anything in a library, and a good librarian is so much better than any Google search will ever be.

Libraries evolve as society changes. When I was a primary school kid, I spent a lot of time in public libraries after school, on Saturdays, in school holidays and on days when I was off from school sick or injured, because I was pretty clumsy. At this time, home computers were becoming a thing. Often families could not afford a computer or, if they had a computer, they could not afford internet access at home. At the local library, there was a small collection of computers that you could book and access the internet.

Every afternoon after school, the computers were always booked out by the local high school students doing their homework, preparing resumes or just doing whatever teenagers did on the internet then. During the day there were always people using the computers too—applying for jobs, engaging with services or just doing that thing we all loved doing, surfing the net, because it was such a new thing and it was really exciting to sit at a computer and search for things. I always loved it when I was there and there was a free computer that I could use. I was never allowed to just book the computers out when they were busy; I had to wait for them to be free and then mum would let me.

But I also loved borrowing books and browsing the shelves. For those who know me, I always have a book on the go. For the last few years, I have read at least 40 books a year as a way of relaxing. I think that comes from my mum's love of reading and time in libraries. I still do not know the Dewey Decimal System like mum, but I do love an alphabetised bookshelf.

I enjoyed that experience in the libraries of using the computers—even though we had computers at home, because dad is an engineer—and watching people of all ages not only use them but also be assisted in what they were using them for by the librarian. Librarians go above and beyond to learn what people need and upskill, either in work time or out of work time, to be able to help people in libraries with what they need. So, to me, librarians are superheroes. While I am probably a bit biased, they are skilled researchers, teachers and all-around helpful people making the world a better place—from running Giggle and Wiggle and story time for our youngest members of society, and a whole range of other amazing things that children's librarians—which my mum used to be at one point—do, to providing spaces for groups to meet and programs for all ages.

Libraries are still a place where anyone can access a computer and the internet. I think sometimes as a society we forget that there are still people who do not have access to the internet in their pocket or at home. As the world becomes a more digital place, they deserve just as much access as anyone else, and libraries are a place that provides this.

Here in Canberra we are fortunate that many of our libraries are co-located with our colleges, giving our school students not just access to their teacher librarians and resources but also exposure to the library and community more broadly when they are at school. When my son was a bit younger and we would visit the Tuggeranong library we would always have to do a lap upstairs so he could see what the teenagers were doing—and he always got a lot of smiles from the students. I have a feeling that Miss Nuttall probably witnessed his enthusiasm in the Tuggeranong library on many an occasion.

But I wish libraries were a more attractive career path after school. Many of our librarians are university educated with degrees in library science or information studies. Librarians are so much more than someone—like a bookworm wearing a cardigan—that helps you borrow or return a book; they are skilled researchers and information gatherers who can teach you how to use those skills for yourself. As Miss Nuttall said, at a time when information is becoming more fractious and divided, it is really wonderful to have people in society who can help people research for themselves.

I also want to echo what Minister Cheyne said about the National Library. We are really lucky here in Canberra to have the National Library. I know, from my time at ANU and the library's proximity to ANU, that so many students would study there during uni, particularly around exam times when campus libraries would often fill up, often by people just claiming a space and disappearing. So, while the National Library is not counted in the ACT's public libraries, it is still a wonderful public space offering many of the services our libraries offer, although not the same borrowing facilities with such a great book collection.

I will always support secure jobs. It is hard for people employed on a fixed-term and casual basis. Where we can prioritise permanent employment, it makes such a difference to an employee's life. I hope that, as part of the motion—once we see what services we need in libraries and where there is that need—that we can ensure that we prioritise employing people on a permanent basis, whether that is full-time or part-time depending on what people need.

I have every faith that, as society continues to change, libraries and librarians will continue to evolve to ensure that no-one in our community will be left behind and that an ACT-level Labor government will continue to support our libraries. So I will be supporting Mr Milligan's amendment and the motion.

DR PATERSON (Murrumbidgee—Minister for Police, Fire and Emergency Services, Minister for Women, Minister for the Prevention of Family and Domestic Violence, Minister for Corrections and Minister for Gaming Reform) (3.55): I just thought I would add a very quick shout-out to our Legislative Assembly Library as well. There have been multiple times over the past few years where I have contacted them seeking some obscure information, and they have been incredibly helpful. So thank you—a shout-out to Legislative Assembly Library.

MS CLAY (Ginninderra) (3.56): I want to speak quickly about Belconnen library. I love Belconnen. I grew up in Weetangera and I later moved to Hawker and Aranda. My partner grew up in Cook and he later moved to Cook. So, when we got together, we had a really big decision to make. We knew we were going to live in Belconnen, but would we live in Cook or would we not live in Cook? I managed to get him out of Cook on the basis that all of Belconnen is equally awesome, and we are really, really happy there. We are raising our daughter now in Macquarie, in Belconnen, and it is a great place to live.

I was really sad when this motion came up to see that Belconnen is clearly leading Canberra in library closures. That really broke my heart. I have used our Belconnen library through a lot of different stages in my life for a lot of different reasons. I used to read a lot, and I was writer before this job—so I have borrowed a lot of books. When I had a little one, going to Giggle and Wiggle was the high point of our week. It is such great outing. When you are at home and maybe not talking to people so much, going to those programs is really important.

I have had a lot of stages in my life where I have been helping family members through pretty tricky periods when I have needed a JP and I had not been earning money. So having free access to JP is so essential. There are so many different services that we get

from our libraries, and for them not to be open when we expect them to be open is really heartbreaking.

I would like to thank Mr Braddock for bringing this motion forward today. I am hoping we end up in a good place as a result. I would also like to thank him for giving us the opportunity to see a couple of librarians unleashed. I think that has been quite glorious.

MR BRADDOCK (Yerrabi) (3.57): In closing, I wish to speak to the amendment. The Canberra Liberals amendment removes the commitments to the minimum standards and staff increases in accordance with population growth. The amendment then goes on to include calls for financial modelling of the proposed staffing and report back to this Assembly. The Greens have no issue with the additional insertions as part of financial planning and development of a budget. We do, however, not support the removal of an in-principle commitment to meet the bare minimum standards for such things as opening hours and staffing availability to answer Canberrans' questions. Our libraries are an essential service to our community.

In moving the amendment, the Liberals have dressed it up in a cloak of financial responsibility—and I agree with that. But I would note that there have been motions here in this place that have called for additional police numbers, without any regard of the financial modelling of what that would entail. It is also disappointing that the ACT Labor government will be supporting the Liberals' move to water down the modest calls to meet the minimum standards as specified in this framework.

The ACT government has developed a wellbeing framework, which includes multiple goals of which are clearly contributed to by our public libraries. These include the indicators of social connection, identity and belonging, education and lifelong learning. Any reduction of the services in our libraries would be at odds with the Labor government's own wellbeing framework.

A refusal to commit to keeping ACT libraries' doors open to a bare minimum standard is out of touch with Canberrans' lived experience. I would encourage all members to check the ACT Libraries Facebook page and track the closures, like I mentioned earlier. On the principle that our libraries are an essential community infrastructure that cannot be skimmed on, the ACT Greens will not be supporting the Liberal amendment to remove a commitment to achieve a minimum standard.

I note the minister's reference to the reality that the National Library provides services to Canberrans amongst its national role. But I do not believe that this could be a justification for not meeting a minimum standard. Also, the benefit of being both a territory and a local government has some significant advantages when it comes to the ACT—for example, the Gungahlin library, which is shared between Gungahlin College and also provides a service to the community. But I will note that the government has announced plans to move that Gungahlin library to Gungahlin town centre east, away from the college, negating that advantage. I think that is an example where it might not allow specialisation in terms of being able to support the different needs of the different customer groups; it is also removing the ability to meet that bare minimum standard that I have been calling for.

In closing, I would like to thank all members for their contributions today, particularly

those who shared their experiences of libraries. I would like to thank Ms Cheyne and her office for their engagement in developing this motion and organising briefings from government officials. I think it made for a much better motion.

As I opened with a quote, I will close with another by Jorge Luis Borges, who said: “I have always imagined that paradise will be a kind of library.” I commend my motion to the Assembly.

Question put:

That the amendment be agreed to.

The Assembly voted—

Ayes 19

Noes 4

Chiaka Barry	Deborah Morris	Andrew Braddock
Yvette Berry	Suzanne Orr	Jo Clay
Peter Cain	Mark Parton	Laura Nuttall
Fiona Carrick	Marisa Paterson	Shane Rattenbury
Leanne Castley	Michael Pettersson	
Tara Cheyne	Chris Steel	
Ed Cocks	Rachel Stephen-Smith	
Thomas Emerson	Caitlin Tough	
Jeremy Hanson	Taimus Werner-Gibbings	
James Milligan		

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Amendment agreed to.

Original question, as amended, resolved in the affirmative.

Justice—bail law reform

MS MORRIS (Brindabella) (4.05): I move:

That this Assembly:

(1) notes that:

- (a) justice outcomes continue to fail victims in the ACT;
- (b) on 6 March 2025, ACT Policing reported seven teenagers had been arrested for their alleged involvement in multiple home burglaries and car thefts;
- (c) according to police, all seven teenagers were known to police and were in the community on bail or subject to good behaviour orders;
- (d) the alleged offenders had been arrested more than 190 times, and one boy has been charged in relation to more than 70 offences;
- (e) on 9 March 2025, police arrested a man who allegedly assaulted a police officer, stole a police car, and hijacked a private vehicle while on parole

- for an unrelated offence; and
- (f) on 13 March 2025, *The Canberra Times* reported a family violence offender had been released from jail to serve his sentence at home despite threatening his ex-wife with a pipe-bomb “gift”, threatening to “tip napalm” on her and set her alight, smashing her face into a brick wall and trying to run her over with his car;
- (2) further notes that:
- (a) in 2023-2024, police made 1,184 arrests of people on bail;
 - (b) in the current financial year to February 2025, police have made 676 arrests of people on bail;
 - (c) in 2023-2024, 17.3 percent of apprehensions by ACT police with a breach of bail charge are by people under 18 years, up from 11.9 percent in 2018-2019;
 - (d) there is no offence for breaching bail other than failing to appear in court;
 - (e) the Chief Police Officer has said that due to the number of people on bail, coupled with various demands on police, it is not possible for police to manually undertake compliance checks for all individuals on bail;
 - (f) in February 2025, the ACT Government axed an independent review into the ACT’s bail laws and sentencing when it disbanded the Law Reform and Sentencing Advisory Council due to “budget constraints”;
 - (g) behind Victoria only, the ACT had the second lowest incarceration rate in Australia at 112.6 per 100,000 people in 2024; and
 - (h) the Victorian Labor Government is introducing tough new bail laws that puts community safety first, requires tougher bail tests proportionate to the charge, and creates a new bail offence for repeat offenders; and
- (3) calls on the ACT Government to:
- (a) apologise to victims of crimes committed by offenders on bail;
 - (b) introduce tough new bail laws similar to the Victorian Labor Government, which:
 - (i) places community safety as the overarching principle for bail decision-making for all ages;
 - (ii) introduces tougher bail tests targeted at repeat offenders; and
 - (iii) creates a second-strike rule whereby a person who commits an indictable offence while on bail will face tougher consequences; and
 - (c) report back to the Assembly on progress by the last day of the next sitting week.

Keeping the community safe should be a core pillar of the ACT’s justice system. You only need to pick up the newspaper to see that community safety is a mythical concept in the application of ACT bail decision-making. Day in, day out, we see the list of victims in Canberra growing at the hands of offenders who are known to police, known to prosecutors and known to the courts for violent crimes, yet they have been permitted by our legal system to enjoy their freedom in the community at the expense of others.

Let’s look at some examples in recent weeks. Seven teenagers were arrested for their

alleged involvement in multiple home invasions and car thefts. They are all known to police and were all in the community on bail or subject to good behaviour orders. All had been arrested more than 190 times, and one had more than 70 charges against him. A 15-year-old boy was accused of violently robbing a pedestrian and repeatedly assaulting a shop owner while on bail. A 31-year-old man was accused of inflicting grievous bodily harm on a shop assistant, also while on bail. A 22-year-old man was charged with possessing and firing a gun in public, also while on bail and subject to good behaviour orders. Everyone agrees that this is unjust, but no-one is willing to make it stop. It is the same offenders, only with new victims—victims who could have been spared injury, trauma and financial loss if only the ACT government and the judiciary had first spared a thought for them.

In the 18 months to February 2025, police made 1,860 arrests of people on bail. In just 10 months of the 2023-24 financial year, 17.3 per cent of arrests by police were for breaches of bail by young people under the age of 18, and that is up from 11.9 per cent in 2018-19.

Due to the high volume of people on bail in the ACT and various demands on policing, the ACT's Chief Police Officer, Scott Lee, said it is impossible for police to undertake manual compliance checks for everyone on bail. So the tireless efforts and limited resources of our police officers are diverted to a perpetual cycle of catch and release—a merry-go-round of criminals, both young and old, whose crimes become progressively more severe as they grow in the knowledge that the legal system will not hold them to account. Our officers join the force largely because they are driven by a sense of duty to “protect thy neighbour” and keep the community safe, and, when they put their lives on the line to do just that, their work is undone by a broken bail system and questionable judicial discretion.

The presumption of innocence is a critical principle in our legal system. It imposes on the prosecution the burden of proving the charge, which is a necessary protection of human rights, but what it should not do is give the judiciary license to throw reason and common sense out the window in the application of bail. We need to look at decisions that tip the balance of favour to repeat violent offenders by continually granting them bail, even when their history points to a serious future threat to community safety. I am not talking about an occasional error of judgement that leads to a rare community grievance. This is a pattern of behaviour from bail and sentencing to parole, where we are seeing both the charged and the convicted let loose into the community for reasons that defy common sense.

Convicted rapists, child sex offenders and domestic violence offenders are released to serve their sentence in the community. Just how safe is the ex-wife of a convicted domestic violence offender who threatened to tip napalm on her and set her alight, smashed her face into a brick wall, and tried to run her over with his car? This man has been released to serve his sentence in the very family home where the violence and offending occurred. Bail, which is the substance of my motion today, is being handed out like lollies to repeat offenders with a known history of crime. The justice system is evidently not working. It is failing to protect the community and, in doing so, it is inadvertently creating more victims. The ACT government needs to do better. The ACT government needs to restore the balance between justice, community safety and individual rights.

I have been heartened to see recent moves by the Victorian Labor government to address many of these issues in their own justice system. In Victoria, youth crime by repeat offenders on bail has spiralled totally out of control. As one Victorian mother told the ABC, the justice system failed her family and her 15-year-old son. She said:

He's had multiple cautions and charges, and bailed five times ... As a result of that, his offending has progressively gotten more severe.

Similar concerns from Canberra families have been raised with my office. The Allan government have acknowledged they got it wrong and they have apologised to victims of crime by offenders on bail. The ACT government should do the same. Victorian Labor have said their new bail laws will be the toughest in Australia. They will introduce tougher bail tests targeted at repeat offenders and will create a second-strike rule which introduces a new offence for someone who commits an indictable offence while they are on bail. Most importantly, Victoria will place community safety as the overarching principle for bail decision-making.

Today, I am calling on the ACT government to look to their Victorian counterparts and introduce similar laws to keep Canberrans safe and prevent repeat offenders from committing crimes and creating more victims. If Victorian Labor can do it, then so can ACT Labor. Canberrans at risk of violence by repeat offenders who are known to police, prosecutors and the courts will be better protected with laws that put their safety first and hold offenders to account.

I think it is important to clarify the scope of what we are pushing for today. We need to be clear that the laws we are advocating for do not permit a militant crackdown on offenders on bail who might innocently miss reporting deadlines or fail to do their paperwork on time. These laws do not advocate for a crackdown on someone seeking bail for a minor offence, such as a driving infringement, or someone who has no prior history of crime. These laws are squarely targeted at offenders with a history of violent offences and offenders who commit serious indictable criminal offences, including burglary, drug trafficking, assault and murder while they are on bail.

I know there are concerns that tougher bail laws will increase the number of people on remand. That is to be expected, and it is necessary if we are to protect the community from violent offenders who have a history of crime. I wish we lived in a world where we did not need remand or we did not need prisons, but, regrettably, it is an important part of our justice system because it helps us to strike that very delicate balance between justice, community safety and individual rights.

I am also sympathetic to concerns in the sector that tougher bail laws will only make recidivism worse, particularly for juveniles, but this argument does not stand to reason. The individuals that these tough bail laws would target are already repeat offenders. They are already racking up a list of victims as their increasing criminal activity is unaccounted for. They are known quantities.

When an offender of any age encounters the criminal justice system, it should be seen for what it is: a cry for help. The ACT government and the justice system turn a deaf ear to that cry when they tell offenders: "There are no consequences for your

behaviour.” The justice system incites crime when it tells repeat offenders they will not be held to account. True justice, according to the ancient philosopher Augustine of Hippo, is about reordering love. When an offender encounters the justice system, it is at that point of intervention, if they were not receiving any help or supports before, that we can set about the task of helping them to get their lives back on track. Leaving them to their own harmful devices is not love and can produce no good in our community.

In my conversations with Labor, the Greens and Mr Emerson, they all acknowledged that the bail system does need improvement and expressed some concerns with the approach the Liberals are advocating, but I did remain hopeful from those conversations that, whatever amendments are put forward, they would at least take us one step closer to preventing repeat offenders and keeping the community safe. I have seen some of the amendments that have been circulated on the floor, and “Wow” is pretty much all I can say. They have certainly obliterated any hope that I held. My motion gives us an opportunity to finally get it right on crime by putting community safety first.

I commend my motion to the Assembly.

MR CAIN (Ginninderra) (4.17): I rise today with an overwhelming sense of urgency as we face a crisis that is jeopardising the safety of our community. I thank Ms Morris for bringing this motion to the Assembly’s attention and for her ongoing advocacy for community safety. The motion presented by Ms Morris is not just another call for legislative changes; it is a call for action as immediate as possible, and it is a desperate plea to address the systematic failures that are putting lives at risk every day. The time to act is now.

Justice outcomes in the ACT are failing. The recent reports are nothing short of chilling. On 6 March this year, ACT Policing arrested young offenders—seven teenagers who had been involved in a series of home burglaries and car thefts; seven teenagers who, despite their extensive criminal history, had been allowed to remain on bail or under good behaviour orders; seven teenagers who had been arrested more than 190 times—let that sink in: 190 arrests—and one of the offenders had been charged in relation to more than 70 separate offences.

There are several messages in that unfortunate set of records. The first point is that these known offenders, repeat offenders, were released again, and guess what they did. They re-offended. They were damaging people’s property and depriving people of their property, and who knows at what risk to people’s safety as well if they were interfered with while they were taking property. The second important point is that, if these teenagers or any other offender has a propensity to commit criminal acts, for whatever reason that might be, that is not good for them either. Inculcating bad habits is not good for these offenders, particularly juveniles. Frankly, we do them a mercy by putting them somewhere, away from the community, where they cannot re-offend and working on the causes for that offending behaviour, to try to help them get out of that criminal behaviour.

I do not think anyone in our criminal justice system, either in prison or under charges, had a dream as a young child: “I’m going to grow up one day and be a criminal.” I really do not think that happens. Whatever the circumstances, these lives are on a terrible trajectory, which is no good for our community, but it is also no good for them. So let’s

be a bit more proactive and, frankly, show some common sense by putting people who are at risk of harmful behaviour somewhere where they will not do harmful behaviour, and maybe we will have a glimpse of hope in putting them on a better path. But, unfortunately, we have a pattern in the ACT—a disturbing, reckless cycle that must be stopped before more lives are damaged.

It does not end there. Just days later, on 9 March this year, a man already out on parole for a previous offence assaulted a police officer, stole a police car and hijacked a private vehicle. He is a man who should never have been on the streets in the first place. His behaviour confirmed that. Perhaps the most harrowing case of all, and it is one that causes me particular distress, is where, on 13 March, we learnt that a family violence offender who made horrific threats to his ex-wife, promising to tip napalm on her and set her alight, was released from jail to serve a sentence at home. He is a man who, by all accounts, should not be out in the community; he should face the full consequences of his violent actions. There is no comfort for this offender's partner that he is out in the community.

We have unfortunately heard horrific stories. As was brought up by the police just last year in one of the hearings, a man who was on repeated bail and apprehended violence orders was released again after threats. He was released again after violence. He was released again after threats and violence, and then killed his partner. This should not happen in the ACT. Spare a thought for the victims as well. For someone who is getting home from hospital after being violently assaulted by a partner, guess what the last thing they want to hear is? Their partner is out on bail. Spare a thought for the victims as well.

So we have problems in the ACT. I thank Ms Morris for bringing forward her motion and pointing us in the right direction on some legislative changes. By the way, they are changes that have been proposed by the Labor government in Victoria, which is perhaps often in competition with the ACT as the most forward-thinking jurisdiction, as one might call it. I could call it other things. It would be interesting if the ACT government responds to the Victorian Labor government's announcements. I cannot wait to hear the response. I look forward to ACT Labor ministers commenting on the proposed changes in Victoria. I look forward to that during this debate.

In 2023-24 alone, ACT police made over 1,100 arrests of people on bail and, in the current financial year, we have already seen 676 arrests of individuals on bail. This is a staggering number that should send shockwaves through the Assembly. What do we have to show for it? We seem to have a justice system that allows violent repeat offenders to be free in our community under restraints that do not really prevent them from causing more damage or showing more violence. It is a justice system that offers no real deterrent for breaching bail. The Canberra Liberals had a policy leading up to the last election that bail ought to be an offence. Isn't it interesting that the Victorian Labor Party, in government, has copied that policy? It is a justice system that does not act decisively enough with a focus on community safety.

According to our Chief Police Officer, our police are overwhelmed and unable to manually check compliance of every individual on bail. They just cannot do it. There are not enough police to do this properly. So we have an inactive government that is poorly resourcing areas that they need to resource properly to ensure community safety.

As we know, last month the government scrapped an independent review into bail laws and sentencing, citing budget constraints. It would seem that the government's fiscal mismanagement has led to the failure of an opportunity to find ways to improve community safety, and they pretty much admitted it, "We can't afford it, because we have a fiscal problem in the ACT."

This demands immediate and bold action—frankly, action which the Victorian Labor government is taking—and we need this government to respond accordingly. Laws that introduce tougher bail tests for repeat offenders and laws that create a second-strike rule for anyone who commits an indictable offence while on bail are important changes. The Victorian government has taken the lead with these measures. The ACT must follow suit. They can do so by applauding the Victorian Labor government as they do that. Let's see what is said.

This motion is a lifeline—a vital opportunity to take a stand for the victims of crime and for the safety of every person in this territory. It is also an opportunity to create a better pathway for offenders. We are calling on ACT government to apologise to victims, introduce tougher bail laws and report back to this Assembly on the progress of these critical reforms. I look forward to Labor's response to this motion. Every moment we delay is another moment that a violent offender could be walking free and another moment when someone's life could be at risk. It is time to act. We must stand up, take responsibility and protect our community. It is for the safety of our community, the victims of crime and better justice administration in the ACT. Accordingly, I urge every member in the Assembly to support the motion.

MS CHEYNE (Ginninderra—Manager of government Business, Attorney-General, Minister for Human Rights, Minister for City and government Services and Minister for the Night-Time Economy) (4.26), by leave: I move the amendments circulated in my name together:

1. Omit all text in paragraph (1)(a).
2. Omit all text after paragraph (1)(f), substitute:

“(2) also notes that:

- (a) the ACT *Human Rights Act 2004* provides that:
 - (i) everyone charged with a criminal offence has the right to be presumed innocent until proved guilty according to law;
 - (ii) everyone has the right to liberty and security of person. In particular, no-one may be arbitrarily arrested or detained;
 - (iii) an accused person must be treated in a way that is appropriate for a person who has not been convicted;
- (b) bail is the authorisation for an accused person to be at liberty with the undertaking that they return to court at a later date to face the charge or charges against them;
- (c) the Bail Act 1992 (the Bail Act) provides legislative guidance for the decision maker in making a decision on whether to grant bail;
- (d) sections 22 and 23 of the Bail Act provides for the criteria that a court or authorised officer must consider when making a decision to grant bail to

- adults and children respectively, including the likelihood of a person, while released on bail, committing an offence;
- (e) in deciding whether to make a bail order in relation to an accused person, a court may have regard to any information it considers relevant and reliable;
 - (f) granting a bail order is not a guarantee that an accused will not offend while on bail;
 - (g) a bail order can be granted unconditionally or with conditions;
- (3) further notes that, under the Bail Act:
- (a) a charge of committing a minor offence generally means that the person is entitled to bail;
 - (b) a charge of committing a serious offence generally means that the person is not entitled to bail;
 - (c) section 9D provides for a higher threshold to be considered in the decision to grant bail where a person is accused of a serious offence and the person is alleged to have committed the offence while a charge against the person for another serious offence is pending or outstanding;
 - (d) possible reasons for breaching or cancelling of bail can range from a failure to attend appointments; refusing to provide a sample for drug or alcohol testing; returning a positive drug or alcohol test; failing to comply with a specific condition; not residing at a specifically stated address; through to committing a further offence, and that further offence could vary in seriousness;
- (4) recognises that, notwithstanding paragraphs (2) and (3):
- (a) community commentary persists regarding whether the ACT's Bail Act is meeting the expectations of the community;
 - (b) there have been recent legislative reforms and proposed legislative reforms in other jurisdictions regarding bail legislation;
 - (c) in recognition of the concerns, a review of the Bail Act was referred to the Law Reform and Sentencing Advisory Council in the previous term of Government;
 - (d) the Law Reform and Sentencing Advisory Council has been discontinued by the current Attorney-General;
 - (e) the current Attorney-General has said that she is hopeful that reform will be able to be progressed more quickly;
- (5) calls on the ACT Government to report back to the Legislative Assembly by the first sitting day in May 2025 on progress:
- (a) in relation to (4)(e).".

Certainly, I reject the motion, as it currently stands, for a whole range of reasons. I also want to reject the comment from Ms Morris, at the conclusion of her speech, that the amendments we are putting forward do not take us "one step closer" to bail reform. Actually, they do. I did make clear at the time of my announcement regarding the discontinuation of the ACT Law Reform and Sentencing Advisory Council that bail reform work would continue. I said I wanted to get on with bail reform, and that remains the case. But moving quickly does not mean being reactive. Reactivity can cloud clear

policy thinking and diminish evidence of what works. This motion in and of itself is clearly reactive: a reaction to Victoria’s announcement regarding its bail reforms last week. It probably explains why there are errors in this motion—the conflation of bail with a sentence and the conflation of bail with parole.

I do not doubt the concern and the community commentary, including in the examples given today, but I am concerned about the conflation and the education that is needed. Ms Morris and Mr Cain have doubled down in this conflation in their statements today, which is alarming. It is problematic when it occurs in the community, or in the media, let alone when it occurs in this place by a legislator, and more than one. This sort of irresponsible approach creates confusion and undermines the legislation and the judiciary.

Then there is the commentary that is in the original motion, and that we have heard today from both Ms Morris and Mr Cain, on the judiciary and its decisions. I am particularly dismayed and confused by Mr Cain’s comments. Mr Cain made clear to me how much he values the legal sector and how important its integrity is to him; it is something that we have been firmly in agreement on. Yet he has been commenting on judiciary decisions today—

Mr Cain interjecting—

MS CHEYNE: I just quickly want to draw Mr Cain’s attention to a piece that would have come out when he was Vice President of the ACT Law Society. It is by the President of the Law Council of Australia: “Attacks on the judiciary by politicians weaken our democracy”. Some lines from it are particularly important for all members in this place—

Mr Cain: What is the date of that?

MS CHEYNE: It is 2018, Mr Cain. Remember, I know quite a bit!

Mr Cain: Very current!

MS CHEYNE: I think it is pretty current. The points in it remain current, Mr Deputy Speaker, but I am sure Mr Cain will enjoy familiarising himself with it again. For the benefit of the chamber, here are some particularly important points in that very short paper:

... an established pattern of politicians attacking the motives and impartiality of the judiciary is dangerous, and should be actively resisted ... Judges need to be respected for their role: exercising judgment. Their function is to interpret and apply the law. It is the function of the Parliament to make the law. Constantly questioning a judge’s capacity to interpret law is akin to constantly questioning the legitimacy of politicians to even make any law in the first place.

That is what the Law Council of Australia said—a peak body representing the national legal profession. I think it is an important reminder for all of us—

Mr Cain interjecting—

MR DEPUTY SPEAKER: Mr Cain, I may need to remind you of the standing orders about interjections.

MS CHEYNE: It is an important reminder for all of us of exactly why the separation of powers exists and of the Latimer House principles and the Westminster principles and how much we enjoy those principles as part of democratic function today. I appreciate that Ms Morris is new to this place, but it is a dangerous precedent to set. So I certainly invite the opposition to reflect on any future comments they might make; and on Victoria and Labor, if Ms Morris and Mr Cain had any idea of the history of Victoria's bail laws in just the last ten years, they might not be using Victoria's announcement as inspiration.

What this motion does do is provide an initial opportunity for education in demystifying what bail is and being clear about what it is not. Again, I draw a particular quote to the chamber's attention, "We believe in the inalienable rights and freedoms of all peoples ..."

Do you know where that is from Mr Deputy Speaker? I appreciate you cannot respond to a rhetorical question! It is from the Canberra Liberals: "Our Beliefs". In fact, it is the first line: "We believe in the inalienable rights and freedoms of all peoples." Well then, Ms Morris, Mr Cain and Mr Milligan, perhaps it is worth reflecting on what is in the Human Rights Act, including: "Everyone charged with a criminal offence has the right to be presumed innocent until proved guilty according to law"; "Everyone has the right to liberty and security of person. In particular, no-one may be arbitrarily arrested or detained"; and "An accused person must be treated in a way that is appropriate for a person who has not been convicted." Indeed, incarceration of someone who has not been convicted is widely understood across international human rights law as something that should be a last resort, and that is for many reasons, many of which I expect you are going to hear in the contributions to the debate today.

These people are not "guilty". They have not been "proven guilty". They are not convicted. This is not a sentence, and it should not be treated as a punishment. Again, perhaps the confusion about what parole is, or what a sentence is and how that interacts with bail, does need more time to be worked through in this place, for more people to get a deeper understanding of what the difference is and what that means. It is why the conflation is so dangerous when talking about someone "reoffending" while on bail—"allegedly", for starters, and allegedly offending in the first place. There are a number of reasons that are detailed very clearly in our Bail Act for why bail might be granted. It is also very clear about what conditions might be attached to the granting of bail and that bail is an undertaking by the defendant to appear again at a later date. Where the offence with bail lies is if the person does not complete their undertaking, because that is the commitment they have given.

Breaches of bail, separately, can occur for all sorts of reasons. But a breach of bail, or a condition of bail, is not in and of itself an offence. The police may arrest a person who has breached bail, but then that is taken back to the courts, the appropriate decision-makers, to determine whether further bail should then be refused or whether bail should continue. Again, the courts are able to take into account all relevant information in doing that.

I know Ms Morris, in particular, is a longstanding member of the Liberal Party, and the very first item in the belief system of the Canberra Liberals is being potentially undermined—certainly, in my view, it is being undermined—by some of the comments here today. Rights are inalienable; there is not a hierarchy of rights. The rights that are contained in our Human Rights Act, drawn from the international covenants, are clear, and they should be considered as a whole.

To further the education piece, I would suggest that some people in this place should read the Bail Act, because the current legislative framework contained within it is designed to balance the rights of the accused—the defendant—with fundamental criminal justice principles: with ensuring the person returns to court to face the matter they are charged with, as well as the need to protect evidence and witnesses and to keep the community safe from harm. There is no one-size-fits-all approach to balancing those interests. The role of the government is to maintain a bail framework which allows the court and police to resolve the potential tensions between these objectives on an individualised basis.

One of the ways the Bail Act already does this is by setting out the criteria for granting bail and providing guidance on the matters the court must, or may, give consideration to. This approach is not about curtailing judicial discretion, but, rather, is about supporting the risk-based decision that the court is making in relation to bail. The granting of a bail order is not a guarantee that a person on bail will not offend. No-one can guarantee that; just as there is no model that can mitigate all risk when someone undertakes their bail order. Yet, again, I feel there is a deep misunderstanding, at least from those opposite, about the purpose of bail, about why judicial discretion matters and about why operating within the framework is important, particularly in light of the Human Rights Act.

Mr Deputy Speaker, I was asked today about whether the Human Rights Act, being legislated after the Bail Act, required reform. On further reflection, I do recall that the Bail Act and the provisions within it do operate in accordance with the rights that are provided for in the Human Rights Act. Indeed, retired Justice Refshauge came to that conclusion some time ago, which is useful to any journalist listening.

To that end, Mr Deputy Speaker, the most important parts of my amendments are that, notwithstanding all of the commentary heard today—and we do need to really do a demystifier and an explainer about bail and perhaps the justice system as a whole—I do recognise that community commentary persists about whether our act and the framework it provides is allowing the expectations of the community to be met. There has been plenty of attention, and stacks of negative attention, on bail reform that has occurred in other jurisdictions. We have seen huge numbers of people who are presumed innocent who are incarcerated, and it does not sit well with me and certainly would not be human rights compliant in the ACT.

I am hopeful that reform is able to be progressed more quickly. I am able to provide the Assembly with an update, on the first sitting day in May, on the reforms that are intended. I am not able to do that today, but I can assure the Assembly that that work is underway. If Ms Morris ultimately wanted this motion to be for the purpose of getting a step closer, well that certainly is a step closer, Mr Deputy Speaker. I look forward to fulsomely updating the chamber on that date. I commend my amendment to the

Assembly.

MR SPEAKER: For the information of all members, given the way Mr Rattenbury and Mr Emerson have phrased their proposed amendments that have been circulated, there is going to be a nesting series of amendments coming through, where we will need to have Mr Rattenbury moving amendments to Ms Cheyne's amendments, and we will need Mr Emerson to move his amendments to Mr Rattenbury's amendments to Ms Cheyne's amendments.

DR PATERSON (Murrumbidgee—Minister for Police, Fire and Emergency Services, Minister for Women, Minister for the Prevention of Family and Domestic Violence, Minister for Corrections and Minister for Gaming Reform) (4. 41): I rise to speak in support of the Attorney-General's amendments. I would also like to bring some facts to the table, for Ms Morris. Canberra is literally one of the safest cities in Australia. Crime is not out of control and youth crime is not out of control.

The number of offences reported to ACT Policing overall has decreased, at 7.5 per cent in the past financial year. The number of offences reported to ACT Policing overall has decreased by 17 per cent over the last 10 years. Crime is decreasing in the ACT. Further, we are not Victoria. The number of criminal incidents recorded by Victoria Police in the year from September 24 to this year was 430,000, which was up 15 per cent from the year before. I will reiterate: we are not Victoria.

Any changes or reform to the ACT system should be entirely based in the context of our justice system, and they have to be evidence-based, not based on alarmist claims by the Canberra Liberals. ACT Policing are very effective in addressing criminal activity, and I thank the Chief Police Officer and all members of ACT Policing for their efforts to reduce crime and keep Canberra safe. I would also like to acknowledge ACT Policing's proactive intervention and diversion team, who were responsible for some of the operations that the Canberra Liberals spoke about before.

I thought it was important to start this speech with the definition of bail using the Australian Law Reform Commission's definition.

Bail is a decision on the liberty or otherwise of the accused between the time of arrest and verdict". Bail is, in theory, 'process orientated', aiming to ensure that the accused re-appears in court either to face charges or be sentenced.

When there is a decision to grant bail, "there are often conditions or requirements that may be attached to the grant". According to the Law Reform Commission:

The purpose of refusing bail is to protect the community and to reduce the likelihood of further offending, and should not be used to punish or coerce the accused into a course of action. A person who is on bail before trial has not been convicted of an offence, and this accords with the principle of the presumption of innocence.

I feel it is this that is significantly lacking in the premise of the Canberra Liberals' speeches today.

Bail reform is an issue that I have considered important since I was elected to the

Assembly. In June 2023, I introduced the Bail Amendment Bill as a response to the dangerous driving inquiry that looked into how the ACT could change its laws to help address recidivist dangerous driving and the worst offences of dangerous driving. The passing of these amendments meant that bail will no longer automatically be presumed for the crimes of culpable driving and driving at police, and for repeat offenders of furious, reckless or dangerous driving.

I was also on the JACS committee that conducted the Inquiry into the Administration of Bail last year. The report was tabled on 3 September last year and made 17 recommendations, of which the government agreed in principle to eight and noted nine. Several of these recommendations touch on support services, particularly around Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people. This includes the co-designed bail support program for young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, a wraparound bail support program and an early intervention program for people who are at risk of not complying with bail orders.

The inquiry report noted that when a bail support program is put in place, such as the Ngurrumbai Bail Support Program, the client is “highly likely” to be granted bail, which contributes to a reduction of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people being held in remand. This bail support service developed 271 bail plans for their clients, and 229 of them were granted bail, a success rate of 85 per cent.

ACT Policing provided a submission speaking to the police point of view on bail to the committee. In that submission, ACT police spoke of some of the challenges they face with bail conditions. ACT Policing find some bail conditions are unenforceable, such as curfews without a condition to present to police, or conditions prohibiting drug and alcohol use with no condition to submit to screening.

The ACT government is focused on reducing the risk of recidivism by addressing the criminogenic and unmet needs of offenders, while ensuring the community and victims are protected. The operation of the justice system is crucial to this, and the ACT government continuously seeks to explore different options to balance the safety of victims and the community while improving justice outcomes for offenders.

The trialling of the implementation of electronic monitoring was a commitment of ACT Labor in the last election. Electronic monitoring can be used as a way of monitoring conditions attached to orders, such as parole and intensive correction orders, and can potentially, down the track, be implemented for people who are on bail. It is hoped that this will serve to strengthen the community’s confidence in the ability of justice agencies to monitor a person’s compliance with their order, while also providing an added safeguard for decision-makers to factor into their assessment on deciding whether a person is suitable to be placed on a community order.

The evidence of the impact of electronic monitoring in other jurisdictions is promising. It is hoped that wellbeing impacts for victims will be sustained and direct, as offenders will be subjected to additional monitoring that is likely to reduce breaches and offending behaviour, and alert authorities to breaches that otherwise may go undetected. The ACT government will continue to explore how electronic monitoring could be used as a tool in the ACT justice system to ensure adherence to conditions placed on suspects or offenders through our courts or through our Sentence Administration Board.

Finally, a key factor in my advocacy around bail reform is for victims. Section 23A of the Bail Act requires the prosecutor to tell the court of any concerns expressed by the victim regarding their need for protection from violence by the accused. Additionally, it requires the decision-maker to consider the victim's concerns when making bail decisions. This is a good thing. However, I work with victim-survivors of domestic and family violence that report significant distress in relation to perceived breaches of bail, particularly on family violence orders and personal protection orders. There are clear thresholds for evidence for police to uphold, which I understand. But this is an issue, and I think it speaks to how we work with victim-survivors in circumstances where they feel deeply unsafe when a suspect may be out on bail or an offender on parole.

I will continue to work with ACT Policing, the Victims of Crime Commissioner, the Attorney-General and our community sector to support victims of violence to feel safe in our community. I look forward to continuing this work and very strongly support the Attorney-General's reforms that will come. Thank you.

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS (Brindabella) (4.49): Words used by our opponents with regard to bail just now have included "accused", "charged" and "alleged". Words not used include "guilty" or "convicted". As the Attorney-General pointed out, a key presumption of the ACT's bail system as it stands, and the justice system more broadly, is the presumption of innocence until proven guilty. This principle is not just a legal formality; it is a cornerstone of our democratic society and a safeguard for individual liberties. It ensures that no-one is deprived of their liberty without due process and a fair trial.

As we consider the very important topic of bail reform, we need to ensure that the ACT's laws reflect fairness, justice and the protection of everyone's human rights to the greatest practical extent. The ACT government understands that public safety and personal security are concerns at the front of every citizen's mind. They are, and always have been, fundamental policy priorities for the ACT government. Community safety is an existing consideration in relation to bail decisions, but using a policy blunderbuss set to "revenge" in an effort to constrict, if not cripple, fundamental principles of criminal justice should not be the first option to address this concern in the ACT.

Bail serves as a mechanism to balance the rights of the accused with the need to ensure public safety and the integrity of the judicial process. Decisions to grant or deny bail are not about punishment; they are complex decisions about managing risk. When an individual is accused of a crime, they are entitled to be treated as innocent until proven guilty. Thus, a person on bail is innocent of the charges against them. The Bail Act sets presumptions in relation to the decision to grant or deny bail. For minor offences, there is a presumption for bail. For very serious offences, there is a presumption against bail. For other offences, there is no presumption for or against. There is, however, a human rights principle that persons charged with but not convicted of an offence should not generally be subject to detention. Rather, the decision to grant or deny bail should be made on a case-by-case basis, considering the individual circumstances of the matter. Judges can consider factors such as the nature of the offence, the accused's criminal history, ties to the community, and the likelihood of appearing in court.

Providing young and vulnerable individuals who are granted bail for minor offences

access to community-based support and rehabilitation services is likely to be more effective in addressing the root causes of criminal behaviour. Lower recidivism rates translate to fewer future costs for the justice system. Blanket presumptions against bail can lead to the pre-trial detention of individuals who pose no significant risk to public safety or flight. They are individuals who, at the point of charge—let me say it again—have not been convicted.

We do not need a very active collective imagination to understand what being remanded in prison can mean for an accused person, let alone someone who is found not guilty at their trial. Research consistently shows that pre-trial detention can have devastating effects on mental health, educational attainment and future prospects. Perhaps only the Canberra Liberals would be surprised that young and vulnerable people from marginalised communities are particularly susceptible to the negative impacts of incarceration. In prison, they are exposed to environments that can exacerbate their vulnerabilities, leading to long-term psychological harm and increased likelihood of re-offending.

I also want to highlight a line in the initial motion that was a real “whoa” moment for me when I read it. It says:

behind Victoria only, the ACT had the second lowest incarceration rate in Australia at 112.6 per 100,000 people in 2024 ...

like that is a bad thing. If nothing else, it is now crystal clear how far from the ACT’s sensible centre the Canberra Liberals have already tacked this term. It seems that, instead of working to reduce the incarceration rate in the ACT, the Canberra Liberals prefer that it increased.

According to the ABS, at 30 June 2024 the ACT’s incarceration rate had increased from 103, at the same time in 2023, to 113 per 100,000 adults. But that is not enough, apparently. We are still too close to Victoria’s rate of 108. So what is our opponents’ ideal incarceration rate? What is the number they need to feel safe and to accept that Canberra is not on fire? Should we be aiming to sweep enough people accused of minor offences off the streets and into prison to get our incarceration rate up to the Australian rate of 208 prisoners per 100,000 adults?

Incarceration has far-reaching negative effects on families, communities and society as a whole. It leads to poor physical, psychological and economic outcomes for those imprisoned, as well as their families. Children of incarcerated parents, for example, suffer significant declines in academic and health outcomes. That does not seem like an ideal society outcome to me, but, then, I am not a reactionary.

Perhaps a rate of 208 per 100,000 adults is not enough either. Should we be beating South Australia, at 224, or Queensland—tough on crime, bigger on prisons—with its rate of 251 prisoners per 100,000 adults? That number is going to go up with the new government, but will Queenslanders feel safer as it steeples? Will they feel safer as their government spends hundreds of millions of extra dollars of taxpayers’ money on their way to Western Australia’s incarceration rate of 340 prisoners per 100,000 adults?

Do people in the Northern Territory feel safer? Its rate of imprisonment is 1,182

prisoners per 100,000 adults. It is second in world jurisdictions behind El Salvador. Half of the prisoners in the Northern Territory are on remand. That number is also going to go up with their new hard government in charge. One thousand, one hundred and eighty-two is not enough in the Northern Territory. Would it be enough in the ACT? Should the ACT be close to the Northern Territory and further away from Victoria? Would the Canberra Liberals be at the front of the queues to apologise to individuals remanded in jail under their proposal and later found not guilty?

I note that Northern Territory Supreme Court judge Jenny Blokland was reported, not four days ago, saying that, instead of it being a deterrent, incarceration appeared to drive repeat offending in the Northern Territory. She pointed to The Netherlands, where there is a low rate of imprisonment—54 prisoners per 100,000—which is an indication of community unsafety that must terrify our opponents! But this rate is still falling, along with the crime rate. Justice Blokland said that contributing factors included shorter sentences by Dutch courts, alternative penalties, such as community service, and the use of innovative programs, including sentencing without a judge.

The research around this issue also suggests further reasons, including a community that has higher levels of wealth and education than the Northern Territory, like the ACT. Here, I would like to note the latest *Report on Government Services* from the Productivity Commission. It provides an average incarceration rate across the year. Much to the disappointment of those opposite, no doubt, these figures show that the ACT had the lowest imprisonment rate of all states and territories in the previous reporting period: 105 people per 100,000 adults. This is a good thing. The ACT's low incarceration rate, compared to the rest of Australia, is a reflection of our belief in the potential for rehabilitation and the importance of community-based solutions.

Programs that focus on education, mental health support and employment opportunities are crucial in preventing crime and reducing recidivism. But the goal of a lower incarceration rate does not mean being lenient on crime. We hold individuals accountable while also providing them with the tools and support they need to turn their lives around. This approach is not only more just but more cost-effective in the long run. As it reduces the burden on our prison system, it promotes a safer community.

As policy-makers, it is our responsibility to ensure that our justice system is fair, just and effective. Keeping young and vulnerable people, who have not yet been convicted of an offence, on bail and out of prison, as far as practicable and appropriate, leads to better outcomes. In stark but admirable contrast to our opponents, Minister Cheyne is not using brutal and simplistic stunts masquerading as policy proposals to lead the reform of the ACT's bail laws. Rather, she is using the weight of evidence, comprehensive consultation and respect for the rights of every person affected by crime in a serious, considered and full-court press on this complex and emotional policy issue.

Prioritising and addressing the root causes of crime, such as inequality, poverty, lack of education and mental health issues, rather than resorting to punitive measures, is a policy approach the ACT's community expects. It is the policy approach that the ACT government is delivering.

MR RATTENBURY (Kurrajong) (4.59): It is January 2020 in Victoria. Ms Veronica Nelson is a proud Gunditjmara, Dja Dja Wurrung, Wiradjuri and Yorta Yorta woman.

She is 37 years old, has a mum and a long-term partner who adore her, and she has just unsuccessfully applied for bail on a minor shoplifting charge. Veronica is locked up alone in a cell. She pleaded for help 49 times that night, vomiting, withdrawing and suffering from a medical condition, and she finally died on the floor. The coroner said her final hours were cruel and degrading, and the inquest found her death was preventable. Veronica would not have been in jail, with bail refused on a minor charge, if the state's bail settings had not been tightened so poorly and reactively in the wake of the 2017 Bourke Street car attack.

After much lobbying by experts and stakeholders, in 2023 the bail system was appropriately reformed. What we are seeing now in Victoria is the direct result of a government capitulating to the Police Association, Kerry Stokes's Channel 7, and Murdoch's News Corp, who have been campaigning relentlessly against the hard-won 2023 bail reforms. There have been months of alarmist headlines in these media outlets preceding the Victorian government announcing its new bail reforms. The *Herald Sun* ran 21 stories, including four front pages, editorials and opinion pieces, and it launched a petition pushing for reforms in the week before the Victorian government capitulated and introduced the bail bill into parliament. The Canberra Liberals' motion today largely follows the same playbook.

The evidence shows that Canberra is one of the safest places you can be. The statistics show it. Dr Paterson spoke to some of those numbers earlier today. However, when presented with a narrative that is based on fear and selected coverage, it is understandable that people's perceptions of their own safety might not be in line with those statistics. We should take these concerns seriously. It is important that our community is safe and that people feel safe. However, as the Executive Director of the Justice Reform Initiative, Dr Mindy Sotiri observes, while there is a need to prioritise community safety concerns, the best way to do this is by looking at the evidence about what works to reduce crime.

We see ACT Policing's media team not missing an opportunity to identify when they have arrested someone on bail. That is a new affectation and was not a practice I recall a few years ago. It has been the same for driving offences and for young people and children they arrest when the debate about the minimum age of criminal responsibility was on. The deliberate strategies are relatively easy to observe if you look closely.

Ms Morris's motion calls for what she has described as "tough new bail laws", similar to that of the Victorian Labor government. With all due respect, I would rather listen to experts, like the tripartisan Justice Reform Initiative, with patrons you would think the Liberal Party would actually consult with: Kate Carnell, Gary Humphries, and former ACT Chief Police Officers Rudi Lammers and Neil Gaughan.

This week, the Justice Reform Initiative said:

The Victorian Government's proposal to reduce access to bail—including removing the principle of remand as a last resort for children—represents a costly, ineffective and harmful response to crime that will not work to keep communities safe.

While there is a need to prioritise community safety concerns, the best way to do this is by looking at the evidence about what works to reduce crime ... Dr Mindy

Sotiri said the Victorian Government needed to recognise both the overarching failure of imprisonment as a solution to crime prevention, and the failure of knee-jerk politicised law-making.

“Community anxiety and fear about crime should be taken seriously, but the proposed changes to bail will not improve community safety or address the underlying drivers of criminal offending,” Dr Sotiri said.

“We need to be very clear that talking tough on crime, or calling laws ‘tough’, is very different to actually engaging in the work that is required to build safer communities. The *Tough Bail Laws* proposal in Victoria is based on politics rather than evidence.

“The evidence is very clear that punitive bail laws do not deter crime, and locking people up on remand does not ultimately make the community safer. The experience of any form of imprisonment (regardless of whether someone is sentenced or on remand) is criminogenic—that is, it increases the likelihood of ongoing criminal justice system involvement.”

“The evidence is also clear that funnelling more people into prison on remand is incredibly expensive, disproportionately impacts First Nations communities, causes enormous harm, and fails to address the drivers of criminal justice system contact.” ...

The implications are even more acute for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. We have already seen in Victoria the way that restricting access to bail results in net-widening and causes significant harm to First Nations communities who are already disproportionately imprisoned by the state of Victoria.

“The implications are even more acute for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. We have already seen in Victoria the way that restricting access to bail results in net-widening and causes significant harm to First Nations communities who are already disproportionately imprisoned by the state of Victoria.”

Dr Sotiri urged the Victorian Government to refocus its attention and resources on supporting frontline service providers and First Nations led organisations that are working to address the causes of offending.

“We need to take a clear-eyed look at what actually works to protect the community. We especially need to look *outside* of prisons, to the community-led, evidence-based programs and supports that we know are successful when it comes to reducing crime. This includes pre-charge diversion programs; alternative first responder models; bail support and housing; First Nations place based approaches; specialist courts and post-release support that genuinely address the drivers of criminal justice system contact”

Ms Morris sets out a few statistics about the number of breaches of bail in the ACT. She makes no reference to whether the breaches were minor, like reporting a little late to the station, or whether they were even proven. I note the remarks touched on those points but the statistics did not. They do not take note of how many people successfully complete their bail orders without breaching them. She is silent in her statistics on how many matters that had bail orders attached are ultimately dismissed or end when people are found not guilty of the offence that the order was attached to.

I move the following amendments to Ms Cheyne's amendments, together:

1. After paragraph (3)(d), insert new paragraph:

“(4) additionally notes that:

 - (a) evidence shows remand, even for short periods, increases the risk of reoffending due to the criminogenic nature of incarceration;
 - (b) bail support programs aim to reduce offending while on bail, increase the likelihood of a person facing criminal charges appearing in court, decrease court appearances, and provide an alternative to remand;
 - (c) evaluations of bail and support programs have found them to be effective at reducing contact with the justice system, reducing imprisonment, and facilitating access to support and treatment;
 - (d) there is one adult bail support program in the ACT – the Ngurrumbai Bail Support Program delivered by the Aboriginal Legal Service NSW/ ACT. This program is available to First Nations clients and involves case officers attending the Magistrates Court to work with clients to develop a tailored bail plan that addresses likely obstacles weighing against bail in considerations such as housing, employment, education, and bail compliance; and
 - (e) the Standing Committee into Justice and Community Safety's *Inquiry into the administration of bail* report tabled at the end of the 10th Assembly includes recommendations 8 to 10 relating to bail support programs;”.
2. In paragraph (4), omit “notwithstanding paragraphs (2) and (3)”, substitute “notwithstanding paragraphs (2), (3) and (4)”.
3. After paragraph (5)(a), add new paragraph:

“(b) in relation to the Government response to recommendations 8 to 10 from the *Inquiry into the administration of bail* report.”.

For clarity, my amendments speak to the evidence which shows that overuse of pre-trial detention does not ultimately make the community safer. In fact, it increases the risk of re-offending due to the criminogenic nature of incarceration, even when the remand period is short-term. We know that 46 per cent of the ACT's prison population is on remand. Furthermore, 41 per cent of unsentenced people in the ACT have been held on remand for longer than three months, 21 per cent for longer than six months, and seven per cent for longer than a year.

The reliance on remand exacts a severe toll on an individual's work, housing and family relationships. Remand, especially when the person on remand is the primary carer of children, can have a substantial and disruptive effect on families and increases the likelihood of children being placed in out-of-home care. We know there are not enough opportunities to occupy, educate or upskill our current remandee cohort already.

I am interested in more bail support programs and ways we can help people on bail complete their orders. Evaluations of bail and support programs have found them to be effective at reducing contact with the justice system, reducing imprisonment and facilitating access to support and treatment. We have here the Ngurrumbai Bail Support

Program, which is run by the Aboriginal Legal Service, available to First Nations clients. This program involves case officers attending the Magistrates Court to work with clients to develop a tailored bail plan that addresses likely obstacles weighing against bail, in considerations such as housing, employment, education and bail compliance. We should explore how to expand this, including to children and young people and to those who are not First Nations people.

We have the Justice Housing Program which provides accommodation for people in the justice system and plays a critical role to keep people on a positive rehabilitative pathway, reducing recidivism and improving the wellbeing of the individual and their families. It ensures people are not released into homelessness or unnecessarily held in detention because they do not have a place to go. The government should consider expanding that so that more people can be bailed to reside there safely and receive wraparound support. We also have the ALS running the Front-Up program, which helps clients deal with outstanding warrants. We can do more in that space to help people deal with their breaches and warrants in a timely and culturally safe way, so that the chance of being remanded in custody is minimised. Prisoners Aid do tremendous work on the smell of an oily rag. If you read Andrew Fraser's piece in John Menadue's public policy journal "Pearls and Irritations" on the benefits achieved through justice reinvestment, you could only be inspired.

In closing, I would like to thank the Attorney-General and her staff for being available to discuss this PMB and for the spirit in which they shared the information they were able to. I would also like to thank Mr Emerson and his team for their willingness to discuss this PMB. And I appreciated the conversation with Ms Morris in advance of this motion. It was one of those conversations where there is a range of things to agree on, but it is the differences that we end up highlighting in this chamber. That is always the challenge in politics. I struggle with some of the discussion. I find references to being "tough on crime" unhelpful. That would be the diplomatic choice of words. Less diplomatically, I find it lazy. Crime is hard and justice is hard, but, when you actually look at what can be done to make a difference, you will see it takes hard work, it takes resources and it takes money.

Ms Clay spoke this morning, in the debate on the appropriation bill, about the benefits of the Drug and Alcohol Sentencing List and the impact that has had. The economic savings that it has made was the particular context she spoke about in the budget debate. But, at a human level and at a community safety level, that program takes people who are repeat offenders—people who have gone through our criminal justice system time after time—but what the evaluations show is that people who go into that program do not re-offend. That makes a real difference to community safety. It is hard work and it is expensive, but it is actually saving more money than it is costing, and it makes a genuine difference to community safety. The people in that program are the people who are stealing cars, committing home burglaries and are involved in assaults. That is their history. I do not want to speak about individuals, but, if you look at the pattern of people who come through that model, you will see that is the sort of track record they have—the exact issues Ms Morris is talking about. It is hard work, but it makes a genuine difference.

I observe that it is disappointing and scandalous that, in the week after the Closing the Gap report came out, measures are proposed in the Assembly that would see the ACT

go backwards, when First Nations people are already significantly over-represented and significantly disadvantaged. Veronica Nelson is buried on Yorta Yorta land next to her dad. We can prevent more people like Veronica being remanded in custody if we learn from the experiences of other jurisdictions and from the evidence. The evidence is clear: knee-jerk bail reform, fuelled by alarmist police media campaigns and media campaigns more broadly, put at risk the most vulnerable in our community. Like one criminal lawyer in Victoria said about the new Victorian laws:

“It feels like this has been packaged up very quickly in response to commercially driven histrionics by media outlets ... “Combine that with a government that’s spooked and you get policy that’s driven by crisis—manufactured or otherwise—that lurches from one way to the other.”

Bail laws should be informed by an evidence based approach that genuinely centres community safety. Remanding people in custody should only be used as a last resort.

MR CAIN (Ginninderra) (5.12): I have just a couple of thoughts on some of the responses to Mrs Morris’s motion and our speeches. It would seem to Mr Taimus Werner-Gibbins that Victorian Labor is a hard reactionary government because they fit all the criteria on which he criticised us. Victorian Labor is a hard reactionary government according to ACT Labor! Further, Mr Werner-Gibbins, why does our current Bail Act have presumptions against bail? Noting all your correct presentation about the presumption of innocence, which I support, of course—why does the government’s own Bail Act have a presumption against bail for certain offences? It does not align with your rhetoric. It does not line up. You are contradicting yourself. Your own laws contradict you. Dr Paterson, sort of indicated, “Well we are not as bad as Victoria.” So you mean you would support these changes if we were as bad as Victoria? Or how close do we need to get to Victoria? So again, there is a lot of incompleteness in the Labor argument: a lot of incompleteness. Happy to talk about high-level principles which are true—

Dr Paterson: Evidence-based, is what we are talking about!

MR CAIN: —evidence-based decided by whom? Evidence-base as decided by whom? Does the evidence-base include the effects on victims of a violent assault who are then murdered? Is that enough evidence for you? Or does the evidence include one offender offending 70 times and still getting bail? Does that evidence account for anything?

It sounds very high-minded—from the Labor government ministers and speakers—very high-minded rhetoric but totally contradicted by their own legislative scheme. Totally contradicted! I bet if they had a reason to bring in an amendment to bail—e.g. maybe they want to add an offence to the presumption against bail—we would hear none of this language. We would hear none of this high-level rhetoric because it is something they want to do. So, Mr Deputy Speaker, it is very disappointing to hear our concerns—deep concerns, from the community—totally dismissed as hard reactionary—an assault on the separation of powers. My goodness! You know you would change if you had enough reason to, and then all your rhetoric would be denied.

Members interjecting—

MR CAIN: —decided by who? Who do you look to? In terms of what we agree on—and I appreciate Mr Rattenbury indicated that, and I think I made this pretty clear in my own speech—of course we do not want people doing this sort of behaviour, for their sake. We want them rehabilitated. We want them supported. We want them diverted into a better life. Of course we do, but of course, this is part of the legislative scheme in the ACT that we are addressing today. The other part is the failure to support properly, the so-called human rights compliant prison—which it is not—the AMC—the government’s own rhetoric on yes, rehabilitation and diversion, and yet the prison is a failure under their own Human Rights Act. The mere fact that accused on remand are mingled with sentenced criminals is a breach of the Human Rights Act. You know that.

So we agree that people need to be rehabilitated. We agree they need to be shown a better path but we agree that the safety of our community should also be a very strong consideration when we are making decisions on what type of offences should have the presumption against bail, presumption of neutral bail, or in favour of bail—the government itself in its own act has that approach. It is a case of looking, yes, at the evidence, and I think some of that has been highlighted in this motion. It is very disappointing to hear this high level rhetoric, which I know will be contradicted if the government itself wants to act.

MR EMERSON (Kurrajong) (5.17): I seek leave to move my amendments to Mr Rattenbury’s amendments and Ms Cheyne’s amendments to Mrs Morris’s motion.

Leave granted.

I would like to thank Mrs Morris for moving this motion as I do believe this issue warrants discussion by the Assembly. While I am sympathetic to the safety concerns raised by Mrs Morris, I do not support the introduction of tough new bail laws in the ACT. An experienced local legal practitioner with expert insights into our bail system, Pierre Johannessen of Johannessen Legal, provided me with the following statement on this matter:

It’s a slippery slope when we prioritise locking up the accused before their day in Court. The Premier of Victoria introduced a tough bail bill in Victoria this week. The Premier says the bill intends “not to punish people who haven’t yet had their day in Court but to reduce the risk of someone on bail reoffending in the community”. With the greatest of respect, one cannot reoffend before being convicted. We cannot and should not take a person’s liberty for granted as though the presumption of innocence until proven guilty no longer matters. That is the inevitable consequence of tougher bail laws.

Harsher bail conditions do little to nothing to dissuade crime. The statistics from the Australian Institute of Criminology, the Sentencing Advisory Council and the Committee for Economic Development of Australia all agree that the current 40 per cent recidivism rate in the nation is not affected by harsher penalties or incarceration at the bail stage of proceedings.

The Assembly’s own *Inquiry into the Administration of Bail* report in 2024 made substantial recommendations, including early engagement programs at the bail stage, citing similar programs in New South Wales that have proven to be effective in both reducing recidivism and diverting from antisocial pathways. In the inquiry

report, the Assembly was enlightened that the bail provisions of the ACT are “not designed to have a therapeutic purpose”. Our system needs fixing and 17 different recommendations were made in the report to address shortcomings. Until those recommendations are acted upon, there is no basis to drastically reframe our moral position on a person’s liberty.

In relation to the examples of crime in our community referred to by Shadow Minister Morris MLA, there is also no evidence that tougher bail laws have any effect in deterring criminal activity. That an alleged offender has been arrested 190 times says more about our community’s inability to rehabilitate offenders, more about our failure to train and employ police, more about how ineffective our remand system is, than whether or not bail laws need to be toughened.

The Shadow Minister’s motion ignores division 2.4 of the Bail Act 1992 wherein there exists a presumption against bail for serious offences committed while charges for another pending or outstanding offence exists, including in family violence matters.

Finally, the Shadow Minister asserts there is no offence for breaching bail other than failing to appear in Court. Section 56A of the Bail Act allows a police officer to arrest a person without a warrant on a reasonable belief that the person has failed to comply with a bail condition. Our jail fails to rehabilitate inmates. More people in more cells is not the answer.

The evidence in relation to being tough on crime in the ACT is clear. Statistics show that our prison system is failing. People leaving prison in the ACT are more likely to reoffend than anywhere else in Australia. By contrast, Canberrans who receive community corrections orders have the second lowest rates of reoffending in the country. This tells us that jailing is failing, and that diversion from the criminal justice system, not more incarceration, is the most effective way forward. However, the government’s level of investment in rehabilitation and diversionary programs does not reflect this.

Despite the government’s own commitment and its response to the bail inquiry to focus on early intervention and diversion, including cultural programs for young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, and the government’s commitments under the National Agreement on Closing the Gap to “mobilise all avenues and opportunities available to them” to address inequality and outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the ACT, the latest data reported by the Productivity Commission shows that reoffending rates in the ACT have worsened for both adult and youth offenders since the agreement commenced—the worst in the country for First Nations people. We know that First Nations children and young people who have a strong connection to their cultural identity and who have access to culturally safe supports are less likely to have interactions with the criminal justice system. However, in the ACT, insufficient funding is provided to create that level of support.

Our approach to addressing crime rates, and particularly youth offending, needs to reflect the evidence. Last week I visited Canberra PCYC who provide rehabilitative and diversionary programs predominantly for young people who have had interactions with, or who are at risk of coming into contact with, the criminal justice system. They are facing strong demand for their services with close to 500 children on the wait list, and

this they say is only set to increase. The age of criminal responsibility will soon be raised to 14 years in the ACT, which is a move that I applaud, but if there are not appropriate systems in place to catch and support the children diverted from the criminal justice system, the results could be problematic. Organisations like PCYC are shouldering the burden of supporting our young people, and they are preparing for the raise in the age, but they are under-funded and unable to come close to meeting demand. They cannot do this work alone. The government must step up and support them. They need meaningful funding.

So I do agree with Mrs Morris that there is a problem here. There is a cohort of Canberrans, including young Canberrans, who are offending and repeatedly reoffending, but as Mr Johannessen says, more people in more cells is not the answer. The ACT prides itself on being a progressive jurisdiction that prioritises rehabilitation and diversion from the criminal justice system. I support this ideal but it actually needs to be implemented, and that is done by providing the level of resourcing that is needed to effectively divert and rehabilitate offenders and potential offenders, which is what my amendments speak to. Of course, prison may be the only place for some. That is the reality, but it has to be a last resort, used only once due process has been afforded. For that reason, I thank Ms Cheyne and Mr Rattenbury for their amendments, which I support. I move the amendment circulated in my name:

1. After paragraph (4)(e), insert new paragraph:

“(5) further notes that:

- (a) youth diversionary programs in the ACT report being chronically oversubscribed and underfunded, with Canberra Police Citizens Youth Club having 480 children on their waiting list;
- (b) Productivity Commission data shows that people leaving prison in the ACT reoffend at the highest rate in the country, but those having received community connections orders reoffend at the second lowest rate;
- (c) a strong sense of cultural identity and pride is a critical determinant of wellbeing for young First Nations people, but there is a gap in culturally safe diversionary programs for young First Nations people in the ACT;
- (d) in its response to the *Inquiry into the administration of bail* report, at recommendation (4), the Government committed to focusing on early intervention and diversionary programs, including cultural programs for young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people at risk of contact with the criminal justice system;”.

2. Omit all text in paragraph (6), substitute:

“(6) calls on the ACT Government to:

- (a) invest sufficiently in rehabilitation and diversion programs for young people interacting, or at risk of interacting, with the criminal justice system in the ACT, to ensure that young people in urgent need of support do not fall through the gaps;
- (b) invest in culturally safe diversionary programs for First Nations young people to build connection to cultural identity;
- (c) report back to the Legislative Assembly by the first sitting day in

May 2025 on progress:

- (i) in relation to (5)(e);
- (ii) in relation to the Government response to recommendations (4), (8), (9) and (10) from the *Inquiry into the administration of bail* report.”.

MS CARRICK (Murrumbidgee) (5.24): I believe it is critical to retain the presumption of bail, a globally accepted human right. Having a presumption of bail does not, of course, mean that bail is granted in every case, and nor should it. We employ judges to consider the context of each case, and we need to ensure they retain autonomy to make decisions based on that context. We know that tougher bail laws do not make the community or victims safer. Strict bail laws lead to overcrowded prisons and higher costs for taxpayers. Strict bail laws also increase recidivism rates and have life-long damaging impacts for children and young people.

Children require additional protection in our legal system, and the best interests of the child must be maintained as the primary consideration whenever the justice system is dealing with children. Instead of seeking to lock up more children, we should be focused on evidence-based solutions that effectively respond to root cause issues, and the systemic drivers of crime. I support bail reform and the proposals by Mr Rattenbury for bail support programs and Mr Emerson’s diversionary programs. As I previously mentioned, we need to ensure judges have autonomy to make decisions based on the facts about whether bail should be granted or not. Thank you for the issues that everyone has raised.

DR PATERSON (Murrumbidgee—Minister for Police, Fire and Emergency Services, Minister for Women, Minister for the Prevention of Family and Domestic Violence, Minister for Corrections and Minister for Gaming Reform) (5.25): I wanted to rise to say one final thing to rebut a comment that Mr Cain made in terms of remanded and detainees mingling. I wanted to point out there has been very significant work by ACT Correctional Services to achieve greater separation by the cohorts in facilitating accommodation. This has resulted in dedicated units being established for both remand and sentenced detainees.

A detainee’s legal status is now the primary factor in determining accommodation placement. Before detainees are housed in a cell, correctional officers will consider any risk to their own safety or the safety of others, their previous custody placements, if relevant, and any potential association issues to ensure the safety and wellbeing of detainees and staff, and to maintain the security of the correctional centre. Detainees can be relocated at any time as part of usual procedures to ensure the safety and security of AMC. Additionally, there may be circumstances where placement of remand and sentenced detainees may be beneficial for individuals for cultural, religious or other wellbeing reasons.

MS MORRIS (Brindabella) (5.27): I do wish to speak to some of the amendments and seeing as Labor, the Greens and the independents have all jumped on the same bandwagon, I will approach all the amendments in one go. It is not so much the additions that I take issue with on these amendments; rather, it is the omissions. By omitting (1)(a) of my amendment, which is “justice outcomes continue to fail victims in the ACT,” you are in fact erasing the experiences of victims of crime by individuals

on bail. You are erasing their experiences, and you are saying that the outcomes that they have personally dealt with do not matter. Shame!

By omitting all of section (2), you are erasing the experiences of our police who put their own lives on the line every single day to keep our community safe. They put their own lives on the line every single day to lock up or to arrest these offenders who have been arrested, some of them more than 190 times and have more than 70 charges against them. You are erasing their experiences and you are erasing the evidence that the ACT's own Chief Police Officer Scott Lee has put forward.

MR SPEAKER: Point of order, Mrs Morris. Mrs Morris, if I could just get you to be seated. A point of order.

Ms Cheyne: Point of order. Mr Speaker, for about the last two minutes, Mrs Morris has been directing her comments directly to me. She has said the word "you" countless times. I would ask that she adhere to the standing orders and address her comments to you.

MR SPEAKER: Thank you, Ms Cheyne. If you could direct your comments through the chair.

MS MORRIS: If I could just make a clarification: I started my comments by saying that Labor, Greens and the independents have all jumped on the same bandwagon together, so when I say "you", it is in reference to all these amendments that I am speaking to.

Ms Cheyne: It does not matter!

MR SPEAKER: Mrs Morris, if I can get you to, where possible, direct your comments through me. Please continue.

MS MORRIS: Thank you. Yes. So by omitting (2), all of those opposite are erasing the evidence of the ACT's own Chief Police Officer, and you are in fact attempting to rewrite history in a true socialist form.

In (4)(e) "the current Attorney-General has said that she is hopeful that reform will be able to be progressed more quickly." I think it is wonderful that our Attorney-General has hopes and dreams for the future, but she also does have power, and she refuses to use it in this instance to keep the community safe and restore justice.

Ms Cheyne: That is not true!

MS MORRIS: When the actions of the judiciary are out of step with community expectations—

Mr Hanson: Point of order. Ms Cheyne just directed an interjection directly at Mrs Morris and I would ask that if she is going to make comments, they are directed to you, Mr Speaker.

MR SPEAKER: Mr Hanson, can you be seated please. There is no point of order.

Members interjecting—

MR SPEAKER: People, who wants to finish this and go home? Mrs Morris.

MS MORRIS: As I was saying, when the actions of the judiciary are out of step with community expectations, it is incumbent on the legislature to reflect on those decisions. The issues that we have been canvassing today, rather than them being reactionary, are longstanding issues that even predate Minster Cheyne’s time in this place; longstanding issues that consecutive Labor-Greens governments have refused to address.

All rights must be balanced. All justice interventions require a trade-off. This motion is about prioritising the rights of people in the community to live in safety, and for all the Attorney-General’s lecturing on rights, not once did she mention the rights of victims and community safety. How very telling is that? It is very clear from the comments that we have heard from the Attorney-General, from the police minister who even managed to pick up the dictionary and find the definition of “bail”—thank you very much police minister for your contribution to this debate!—from the member for Brindabella, from Mr Rattenbury and from Mr Emerson: it is very, very clear that they are all willing to be champions for the human rights of repeat offenders who have a known history of violent crime, but never mind the rights of those in the community to simply be safe. Frankly, these amendments are not worth the paper they are written on, which is a great shame given this is a most serious matter to the community.

Mr Emerson’s amendment to **Mr Rattenbury’s** proposed amendment agreed to.

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

MR SPEAKER: The question now is that Mr Cheyne’s amendments, as amended, to Ms Morris’s motion be agreed.

Question put:

That **Ms Cheyne’s** amendments, as amended, to **Ms Morris’s** motion be agreed to.

The Assembly voted—

Ayes 15

Noes 4

Yvette Berry	Marisa Paterson	Chiaka Barry
Andrew Braddock	Michael Pettersson	Peter Cain
Fiona Carrick	Shane Rattenbury	Leanne Castley
Tara Cheyne	Chris Steel	Ed Cocks
Jo Clay	Rachel Stephen-Smith	Jeremy Hanson
Thomas Emerson	Caitlin Tough	James Milligan
Laura Nuttall	Taimus Werner-Gibbings	Deborah Morris
Suzanne Orr		Mark Parton

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Ms Cheyne’s amendments, as amended, agreed to.

Original question, as amended, resolved in the affirmative.

Appropriation Bill 2024-2025 (No 2)

Debate resumed.

MR EMERSON (Kurrajong) (5.38): I will be supporting this bill out of obvious necessity. I am, however, concerned that the need for the bill betrays serious issues with the government's management of our finances. We know that funding is desperately needed in many different areas. I am concerned that financial mismanagement means Canberrans are falling through the cracks. The need for this appropriation bill does not just signal a financial issue. It signals many missed opportunities. Every dollar blown out beyond budget and every dollar wasted means another project delayed, another investment shelved, another community member in need left waiting for things to worsen without the help they require.

We are already seeing important issues being neglected; long overdue infrastructure projects, obscene public housing waitlists, a community services sector that is desperately crying out for investment to support the most vulnerable Canberrans. Our community needs our elected representatives to do more than lurch from crisis to crisis, putting out spot fires, reacting rather than pro-acting. Our community needs our government to start planning ahead and investing sustainably in their wellbeing. This is not just about lost dollars. It is about lost opportunities to enhance our infrastructure, support vulnerable Canberrans, get behind local businesses and improve the quality and reach of our public services.

Our overworked, underpaid and oversubscribed community service providers have not seen significant funding increases in a long time, despite Canberra's ongoing population growth, increased demand, the insane cost of living and more complex presentations. In fact, government investment in the community sector as a proportion of all government expenditure decreased by 30 per cent between 2009-10 and 2022-23. We know so much of the work that happens in the community sector is preventative, and that is what keeps people out of our hospitals.

Family and domestic violence services are turning away women and children who are living in fear. Doris Women's Refuge, one of Canberra's two longstanding women's and children's shelters, had its funding cut in 2013 and it took 10 years to catch up to those funding levels in nominal terms. There is no culturally safe specialist FDV crisis service for First Nations women in the ACT. Samaritan House, the only crisis homelessness shelter for vulnerable men in Canberra, has a wait list with three times as many desperate people on it as they have beds. Homeless men camp outside Sam House in winter because they know it is a safe place for them, even if there is no space for them to sleep inside.

The ACT government's own research shows at least 4,000 Canberrans live with severe unmet needs for psychosocial support. Frankly, we should not be surprised to see increasing antisocial behaviour and youth crime when the government has repeatedly turned its back on vulnerable Canberrans and has failed to appropriately manage public funds and direct them to where they are most urgently needed. Yes, our budget is

relatively small compared to other jurisdictions, which means we need to be even more effective and efficient with our public expenditure. We cannot afford more blown-out, bungled IT projects. No sane person would waste their money like our government has wasted our community's money.

The ACT government has also often fallen short in securing available commonwealth funding, meaning organisations in desperate need of funding have missed out on grants that could have made a huge difference to their bottom line and to the people they support. To offer one example, the ACT receives zero dollars of the more than \$300 million in federal funding promised or spent on aquatic facilities across Australia between 2017 to 2022. This is despite the need for a new Civic pool having been identified in its own planning documents in 2013. The reason we did not get any funding: we did not ask for it!

This cannot go on. We are underfunded by the commonwealth and by the New South Wales government relative to the cost of delivering health services in the territory. We are getting a raw deal. Why? Why do we continue missing out? We need to fight hard at the negotiating table. We need to front-foot our engagement with commonwealth programs to maximise our funding and to ensure Canberrans get our fair share. That is what our community deserves from their elected representatives. Until that starts happening, until we stop wasting millions, it is not good enough to say we just cannot afford it. I hope this appropriation bill serves as a turning point when it comes to managing the taxpayer and ratepayer dollars of Canberrans.

MISS NUTTALL (Brindabella) (5.42): I rise today to speak in support of the proposed Appropriation Bill 2024-2025 (No 2). My colleagues have previously outlined the importance of preventative healthcare, including increased access to universally accessible, timely and affordable GPs. Mr Rattenbury rightly articulated that we need to get to the core of the problem of why we are seeing such an increased demand for acute health services. He also rightly articulated that if we want to solve that problem we must place enough emphasis on preventative health. I do not believe we have a sufficiently sophisticated measure within Treasury yet—the place that makes the funding decisions—to account for the benefits of preventative health. How do you measure emergency trips that did not happen? It seems like we are only really able to track correlations between the availability of services, like GPs, community health services and the like, with the use of acute health services, but we know how important preventative health is conceptually.

Mr Rattenbury talked about the importance of GP access, and this is something I want to explore because access to preventative health can often look and feel quite different if you are a woman, a young person, a person of colour, queer, have a disability, come from a low-income household or have a long-term health condition. Unsurprisingly, the current crises we see in relation to access to preventative healthcare are intrinsically tied to issues of economic and social inequalities. So let us delve into the ABS data, very briefly, for Australian patient experiences in the 2023-2024 financial year.

Attention to women's health and the health of many trans and gender diverse folks assigned female at birth has been pretty shocking over the years. Too many trials and treatments seem to be tested on cis men as the default, only to find out later that women's bodies react differently, and often worse. Under-researched conditions, myths

about pain tolerance and general medical misogyny mean that on the balance of probabilities women get seen later, dismissed more and helped less. Nothing will radicalise you faster than getting an IUD without commensurate pain medication, I am told. According to the ABS, more women reported waiting longer than acceptable for GP appointments, at 31.6 per cent of women compared to 23.7 per cent of men. When they saw a GP for urgent care, more women—15 per cent as opposed to 9 per cent of men—were seen outside that four-hour window. More women than men reported waiting longer than acceptable to see a medical specialist.

Scarily, women also put off seeing GPs, dental professionals, mental health professionals and medical specialists more than men did. For GPs, it was 32.8 per cent of women versus 25 per cent of men. Now, before I got this job, I would delay buying prescriptions because I was chipping into my savings if I bought too many essentials at once. That was fun. I am lucky, but this experience is certainly not unique to me. We have seen that the number of women delaying filling prescription medication has increased by one third since 2022. Guess what, though—these studies also find that when this happens, 55 per cent sought treatment at an emergency department because they could not see a GP or access medication. This is why considering the ongoing pressures of economic inequality and how they are impacting specific groups of people is so important.

It is the same story for young people. I mean, can you blame us? It is a cost-of-living crisis. Young people aged 25-34 were more likely to delay seeing a GP, 37.4 per cent compared to 11.6 per cent of people aged 85 and over. They were more likely to wait longer than acceptable for a medical specialist appointment, at 36.2 per cent compared to 16.6 per cent. They were far more likely to delay seeing a GP, a dental professional, a medical specialist or a hospital. Here is a really troubling statistic: 30 per cent of people aged 25-34 years old, so almost a third, delayed or did not see a mental health professional for their own mental health when needed, due to cost, compared to 7.8 per cent of those aged 65 years and over. Now, in a perfect system we should not see anyone delay treatment, right? If you need help, you get help. But to have this stark a disparity is pretty shocking.

What about if you are living in areas of most socioeconomic disadvantage compared to the least socioeconomic disadvantage? Well, you are more likely to report waiting longer than acceptable for a medical specialist appointment. You are more than twice as likely to delay or avoid seeing a dental specialist, at 27.3 per cent versus 11.2 per cent, or go to a hospital, at 4.6 per cent compared to 1.9 per cent.

We cannot blame people for trying to survive, but the responsibility does lie with government to identify and eliminate barriers to accessing the health services needed to survive and thrive. What is my point? Well, if you do not fund both preventative and acute health services properly, you will further entrench and compound the disadvantage faced by vulnerable social groups. It seems obvious, but clearly we are not doing enough of it yet.

Just briefly, it is important to acknowledge that preventative health is not just your GPs. So many of our preventative health services are in the community sector; mental health services, STI testing and family planning, psychosocial supports and physiotherapy, just to name a few. The great news is that the community sector is often an extremely

cost-effective place to deliver preventative health services. Where government invests in preventative health, they should invest in the whole preventative health ecosystem and measure it to its full value.

So as parliament deliberates over this appropriation bill and, indeed, as the government draws together the health budget in the middle of the year, I would encourage members to consider the disproportionate impact that affordability and access to health services has on, statistically, the majority of the Canberra community. I would submit that preventative health in all its forms must be a bigger piece of that puzzle.

MR COCKS (Murrumbidgee) (5.48): As has been expressed before, budgets are more than just numbers, statistics and forecasts and more than just bean counting and accounting adjustments. A budget provides, for any who care to look, an enduring picture of a government's honesty, their trustworthiness and their competence. When a budget changes, it signals that at least one of these core values might be compromised.

The appropriation bill that we are considering today, this budget review, is a stark reminder of this truth. We now know that the four-year budget, delivered just four months before an election, was founded on false assumptions and unfounded hopes. In fact, the budget was so wrong that, within a month of taking office, the new Treasurer was authorising tens of millions of dollars in emergency funding under the Treasurer's Advance just to keep our health system from going bust.

Promises are important, and Canberrans deserve more than mere spin from those they elect. But this government's spin machine seems to be stuck in overdrive. Take, for example, the so-called "sound public finances" section of this budget update. That section concludes with this statement:

... the Headline Net Operating Balance (HNOB) is forecast to return to surplus—

that is a word I love to hear in this place: "surplus"—

by 2026-27, with a cumulative balanced position across the three years from 2025-26. In addition, this Budget Review maintains strong net operating cash surpluses from 2025-26.

Again, we are hearing about surpluses.

I wish that were the case. I would welcome a surplus, even on the government's preferred measures. But we already know that those numbers are wrong. We know because officials revealed during the inquiry into this bill that the rotten assumptions that were baked into the last budget remain baked into this budget review. Underestimated health service demand is baked in. Assuming Canberra gets extra commonwealth funding because other jurisdictions do not spend so much, it is baked in. Unbudgeted infrastructure promises are baked in.

All the problems that got us here are still there in the outyears—the same problems that took us from a promised \$24 million cash surplus to a deficit of \$320.5 million this year; the same problems that increased the government's headline deficit for this year by 50 per cent in the space of months; and the same problems that led to the worst deficit in the history of ACT self-government, worse even than the height of the COVID

shock. It is all still sitting there ready to bite again next time around.

The very numbers that the government rely on for their claim of a “cumulative balanced position across the three years from 2025-26” are already fundamentally incorrect—and the government know this. They knew it when they put the budget review together, and they did not reveal it until there was an inquiry. Instead, they made a bold statement that they would achieve a multiyear balanced budget, underpinned by surpluses. I can see no way that that statement could be anything but a work of fiction.

But, sadly, there is more to come, because the government also has to somehow pay for its election promises. Those have not made it to the budget review, either. When asked about this during the inquiry into the bill, the Treasurer said everything promised through the election would be considered through the budget process. But the numbers are out there and, based on published election costings—Treasury’s costings of Labor’s election promises—those promises would completely wipe out the government’s predicted surplus in 2026-27. The evidence is in, and Labor cannot pay for its promises. Really, it seems that Labor no longer has a budget; it simply has a minimum spending target.

Canberrans have high standards. They are smart and they have a strong sense of right and wrong. They can see when they are being taken for a ride, and they deserve better than this. But Treasurer Steel and Chief Minister Barr have kept riding the spin machine, claiming the economy is flourishing and then embarking on scare campaigns around the spectre of a potential change of federal government. I have no doubt that they will keep using federal politics as a local straw man. We will be lucky if we make it through the rest of this debate without them doing so.

But if the economy is doing so wonderfully under Steel-Barr, the question has to be asked: why do so many people feel like they have been kneecapped by one? If the economy is so strong, why are so many businesses shutting up shop? If the economy is so strong, why are people choosing to hand back land purchases from the last ballot? If the economy is so strong, why are new home starts at record lows in the ACT? If the economy is so strong, why would we even be vulnerable from a change of government? If the economy is so strong, why doesn’t anyone outside Labor circles feel like it is strong?

Economic management and budget management have real-world impacts. Running budget deficits year after year means you have to pay interest on the debt you build up. Yes, every dollar of deficit contributes to the debt and every dollar of debt drives up our interest bill. This budget update shows the ACT’s net debt reaching a staggering \$12.8 billion—yes, billion, with a “b”. This means the government’s interest payments have become a major line item. This year, the interest expense passes half a billion dollars. Over the four years this budget is supposed to last, the government will lose \$2.7 billion to interest—\$2.7 billion of dead money returning nothing to the ACT.

I have known people who get into trouble with debt, where they end up getting a credit card to cover car payments and a personal loan to pay off the credit card, and then they max out the credit card again to pay for the groceries they need to live. It is a vicious cycle and it takes away their freedom and their ability to make good choices—good choices for their future and for their family.

The same thing applies to governments. When a government gets into too much debt and bears the burden of ever-increasing interest payments, it takes away their capacity for compassion; it constrains their ability to deliver the number of public houses the community needs; it undermines the government's ability to act on crime and community safety; it encourages bad decisions when it comes to revenue raising; it makes it harder to provide high-quality education for our kids; and it makes it harder to pay for the health care Canberrans need and deserve. That is the situation we find ourselves in today.

Today, this Assembly has to make a binary choice: either we agree to this budget review or the health system goes belly-up. Either we accept a 50 per cent increase to this year's deficit or we undermine Canberra Health Services. Either we accept more debt and money thrown away on interest or we accept the government's shutdown of health. That, in effect, is the ultimatum that the government has given this Assembly.

This is not America. Canberrans do not deserve to be put in this situation. Canberrans should not have to make the choice between good fiscal management and keeping the doors of the health system open. But that is the situation that we find ourselves in today. So, of course, we will vote to keep the health system going. But we on this side of the chamber have serious concerns about what it means for Canberra's future.

MR STEEL (Murrumbidgee—Treasurer, Minister for Planning and Sustainable Development, Minister for Heritage and Minister for Transport) (5. 58), in reply: I thank the members for their contributions to this in-principle debate on the second appropriation bill. The 2024-25 budget review continues the government's record of making necessary investments to deliver a strong and sustainable health system that is responsive to the increasingly complex and growing needs of the Canberra community.

Consistent with the experience of other jurisdictions, the territory's public health system is under sustained pressure from rising costs of service delivery and stronger than expected growth in activity. This has been evidenced by increased demand for hospital beds, significantly more elective and emergency surgeries and rising emergency department presentations. Our health system is also facing the challenges of addressing more complex individual medical needs and integrating rapidly emerging technological advances.

In the face of these pressures and challenges, the incoming government was briefed at the time that we came in in November, when we were sworn in as ministers, that CHS was seeing some emerging pressures and that they would need to be addressed in the budget review. That is why the government is making significant investments through this bill to sustain the delivery of quality, accessible health services for Canberrans. The budget review also reflects the government's continued commitment to balancing economic growth, fiscal responsibility and community wellbeing in the face of evolving economic conditions.

The decision that we had through the budget review, and implemented through this bill, was either to stop the delivery of healthcare services to manage that pressure, or to make the necessary investments in our public hospital systems. We have, of course, chosen the latter, which is being delivered through the extra funding for a local hospital

network through this appropriation bill. As a responsible government, we are taking the necessary steps to manage future risks to the budget from growing health demand. The government will identify a range of efficiencies and process improvements to improve service delivery whilst retaining our public health system's accessibility and flexibility to meet the needs of individual Canberrans.

While the Canberra Liberals would have you believe that the territory economy is in freefall, I am happy to inform the Assembly that the strong economic fundamentals of the territory are what underpin our ability to deliver the services that Canberrans expect. This budget review reflects the government's commitment to robust fiscal and economic management.

Treasury forecasts that strong growth in our economy will continue throughout this financial year, with even stronger economic growth than expected compared to forecasts in the 2024-25 budget. Gross state product has been increased to four per cent in 2023-24 compared to the three per cent estimate in the last budget, and the forecast for GSP growth has been revised up to 3.5 per cent in 2024-25, reflecting strong growth in the first quarter of 2024-25. Employment growth remains robust, growing 2.2 per cent in 2023-24 and our unemployment rate is the lowest in the country at only 3.2 per cent. Inflation has eased faster than expected in 2023-24 due to a gradual adjustment in the balance between demand and supply of goods and services and the degree of tightness in the labour market.

Canberra's economy is strong. I will not be talking Canberra down; I will leave that to those opposite, following in the footsteps of their federal leader, who now poses the greatest threat to the Canberra economy. That is not something that we hope to forecast: a Dutton government that hates Canberra and hates its people, and a government that would strip tens of thousands of jobs out of the public service and risk a major economic shock to the territory—and it could be ongoing. Mr Dutton has consistently said that 36,000 jobs will be cut—and that will come exclusively from Canberra. That is around 13 per cent of all jobs in the ACT.

Since the introduction of this appropriation bill, we have seen the first interest rate cut since November 2020 by the Reserve Bank of Australia, which will provide welcome relief for many Canberrans. Canberra's 2024-25 consumer price index is also expected to be lower than forecast in the budget. It is now forecast to be 2¼ per cent in 2024-25. Hopefully, with continued reduction in inflation, we will see further rate reductions.

In addition to the significant investment in the health system, I would like to summarise some of the other key initiatives being delivered in this budget review. In community services and education, we will provide additional funding to deliver out-of-home care services for children and young people who cannot remain safely with their families; we will continue to support the processing of legal claims by victim-survivors of historical physical and sexual abuse in institutional settings; and support continued cost-of-living relief for Canberra families by providing access to ACT public primary school students to attend one free school camp at Birrigai Outdoor School.

For infrastructure, housing and transportation, we will support future stages of the Garden City cycleway, connecting Watson to the city via dedicated active transport routes, and undertake initial planning and the design for the Molonglo Parkway-Drive

Connector Project, which continues earlier budget appropriations for that purpose. We will provision funding for and begin work on seven projects that are funded through round 2 of the commonwealth's Housing Australia Future Fund Facility. That will construct 750 additional public and community affordable rental buildings for Canberra. We will undertake further planning and design for the Molonglo road connections and provide free travel on Fridays for all Transport Canberra public transport services, as part of a 12-month trial of fare-free Fridays.

Through this budget, this budget review and the appropriation, we are supporting a range of services across the community. The budget review has some very significant initiatives, which were election commitments, that we are delivering on and we will continue to deliver on in each budget over the term.

In justice and community safety, we will provide additional funding to improve the pay and conditions of members of ACT Policing; in conjunction with all states and territories and the commonwealth, continue implementation of the National Firearms Registry, the most significant uplift to Australia's firearms management system since the National Firearms Agreement was signed in 1996; and continue planning consultation to inform the introduction of electronic monitoring for offenders in the ACT.

The 2024-25 budget review demonstrates the government's continued commitment to investing in the wellbeing of Canberrans, delivering critical services and infrastructure and sound fiscal management to strengthen our economy over the long term.

I commend Appropriation Bill 2024-25 (No 2) and the Budget Review 2024-25 to the Assembly.

Bill agreed to in principle.

Detail stage

Clauses 1 to 7, by leave, taken together.

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

Statements by members

St John the Apostle Primary School—fete

MR CAIN (Ginninderra) (6.07): I want to speak briefly about the wonderful St John the Apostle Primary School fete that I attended last Friday evening, 14 March. Alongside my fellow Liberals Chiaka Barry MLA and senate candidates Hayune Lee and Jacob Vadakkedathu, I had the privilege of helping on the barbeque stall. It was an absolute pleasure to work with so many dedicated parents and teachers who made the fete such a success. The fete had a fantastic variety of activities for all the kids and parents, from a delicious cake stall to hampers, badge making and even a chocolate toss; and, of course, a barbeque. But what stood out to me the most was the student artwork that was on display. The creativity and talent of the students was truly impressive.

I encourage everyone to show support for their local community by attending these local school fetes. I certainly had a fantastic evening in Florey and look forward to attending more school fetes across Ginninderra in the future.

Hawker Community Repair Cafe

MS CLAY (Ginninderra) (6.08): I want to give a shout-out to the Hawker Community Repair Cafe. The Community Repair Cafe runs on the third Sunday of every third month. There was one on the weekend and the next one is on 15 June. It is a lot of fun. It is a really good example of how community groups work really well and how the circular economy works. They are co-housed with Softball ACT. They have a whole lot of community connections—including locals who run repair models, and Sunita, who runs a training program to help women learn how to repair things. They have lots of networks. It was a lot of fun.

They usually get hundreds of people each time. The electrical repairs are particularly popular. There was a queue out the door of their new shed. It was great to see that they got some funding for that shed. They have a lot of other things there. There is a woman who weaves rugs from old socks and old t-shirts. There are a lot of demonstrations. There is Lids4Kids and a lot of people with handmade things. It is a great example of how community inclusion at a really good facility can bring people together. The Hawker Community Repair Cafe and the Men's Shed are building possum boxes for ACT Wildlife and garden beds for local community gardens. It is a really nice thing to see.

Get along there next time. It is on the third Sunday of the third month, and 15 June is the next one.

Child care—Forrest Primary School out-of-hours school care

MS CARRICK (Murrumbidgee) (6.09): I would like to give a shout-out to Forrest out-of-school-hours care. I acknowledge the hard work and incredible achievement of Forrest Primary School Parents and Citizens Association, which operates the Forrest out-of-school-hours care. It recently achieved an excellence rating for the third time under the National Quality Framework. This is the highest possible rating in Australia's education and care sector, awarded to services demonstrating exceptional practice in exceeding the quality standards for children's learning, safety and wellbeing. This achievement places Forrest out-of-school-hours care among a leading group of providers, as it is currently one of only two services in Australia—out of nearly 5,000 services—to hold this esteemed rating for the third time. Of the 99 providers in the ACT, this is the only one that has achieved the excellence rating. The excellence rating is awarded to services that go above and beyond national quality standards.

Forrest out-of-school-hours care's achievement is a testament to the dedication of its volunteer management committee, educators, staff and partnership with Forrest Primary School, all of whom continuously strive to create an inclusive, enriching and nurturing environment where children can thrive through play-based learning. Forrest out-of-school-hours care is proudly operated by the volunteer and not-for-profit Forrest Primary School Parents and Citizens Association. This unique governance structure underpins the deep community commitment to deliver high quality and child-centred

care.

Land—community use

MISS NUTTALL (Brindabella) (6.11): The ACT Greens have always been a party of transparency and accountability, and today I wish to speak to a situation in which I and many members in the community feel transparency has been a bit lacking. Block 24, section 286 is a small parcel of land in Canberra that is in the process of being sold. We have been contacted by community groups who have expressed an interest in using this land. However, the government informed us that no community-needs assessment was done. Instead, the assessments from Gungahlin and Molonglo Valley were used as stand-ins.

To put it mildly, Tuggeranong is a unique part of Canberra that faces challenges neither of those areas face. It is not really appropriate to use those areas as a basis for decisions that impact Tuggeranong. When I asked the minister about this in question time, he clarified that the EOI process was supposed to serve as that consultation metric to gauge how the land should be used. That is tricky when the procurement process is already in train and the land is being offered at the market rate. I was interested to hear the minister undertake to get back to me on whether offering land at the market rate was factored into who could participate in the EOI. I appreciate that he gets many letters, but I had previously raised that we were concerned that the EOI had gone up at the market rate without prior community consultation.

We live in a city where land is at an absolute premium, and the groups forced to fight the hardest to get a chance to use some of the available land are often community groups. Some of these groups are responsible for delivering support to the most vulnerable people in Canberra. If the government is not willing to do the bare minimum to ensure land is going to the most deserving groups, what options are left for those groups starved of land?

Discussion concluded.

Adjournment

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

That the Assembly do now adjourn.

Hawker Community Repair Cafe

MR CAIN (Ginninderra) (6.13): I support Ms Clay in her endorsement of the Hawker Community Repair Cafe, which I attended last Sunday. One of my favourite things to do is connect with our community in the Ginninderra electorate and events across it. Last Sunday, I visited the Hawker Community Repair Cafe, which is organised by the Hawker Men's Shed. It is held at the Hawker International Softball Centre. Founded in 2019 by Jon Wells and Rob Gill, the repair cafe aims to provide a safe, friendly and healing environment where members of the community can work on meaningful projects in good company. Volunteers provide a range of services, such as tool sharpening and repair of wooden items; bicycles; fabrics; clothes; furniture; and

electrical goods. It was great to see that a focus of the Men's Shed is to reduce the amount of waste that goes to landfill.

The Hawker Community Repair Cafe has repaired over a thousand items since its founding in 2019. This keeps waste out of landfill but also saves people money on repairs or replacements, which is very valued at this time of cost-of-living pressures. From bikes to mowers, jumpers to socks, and household electrical goods, it is a wonderful milestone for the repair cafe to achieve. It is really heartening to see community organisations like this thriving in Belconnen and it is always a must-attend in my schedule. I thank and encourage the Hawker Men's Shed in advancing the health and wellbeing of our Ginninderra community by encouraging social inclusion.

I encourage all members in this place, not just my colleagues in Ginninderra, to attend a repair cafe in their electorate if they get the chance. I look forward to seeing future success for Jon and all the volunteers involved in the repair cafe, and seeing them at the opening ceremony on 2 May, when the Hawker Men's Shed celebrates their recently-built new shed. I will support them as much as I can as a local member. I look forward to joining members of the Assembly and members of the community on 15 June for the next event.

LGBTIQA+ affairs—International Transgender Day of Visibility

MISS NUTTALL (Brindabella) (6.15): International Transgender Day of Visibility is on 31 March. I have spoken about trans rights a few times this term, and I will continue to do so because this is such a crucial moment to stand up for the rights of all trans and gender-diverse people around the world. Just this morning the ABC reported on the devastating impacts of the ban of hormone therapy replacement and puberty blockers in Queensland. In one case, a mother spoke about having to borrow money because she was forced to use the private sector for her trans daughter's gender-affirming care.

Australia likes to be proud of having a healthcare system that is universal, unlike America, but Queensland has taken culture wars from America's Trump regime and, in doing so, is denying what is fundamentally health care to a huge group of kids. This is the furthest thing from a universal system and it is an absolute disgrace. I was pleased to hear the Chief Minister recently make clear that the ACT would absolutely not be following suit. We in Canberra should be proud of being a progressive city that stands with queer communities, but also we must not be complacent. Social media giants have been particularly complicit in creating a dangerous climate for trans people around the world in allowing transphobic rhetoric, disinformation and downright hate to spread unchecked.

So, as we approach this year's Trans Day of Visibility, I want to highlight what a positive impact trans people make on all our communities. While some culture warriors will have you believe that the very existence of trans people is somehow a danger to the rest of us, the fact of the matter is that trans people are everyday people, just like the rest of us. They are our kids, our students, our teachers, our healthcare workers, our families and our loved ones, and so often they just want to live their lives in peace.

For anyone who may be under the misunderstanding and misapprehension that trans folk are somehow a threat, let me just say that you all probably know at least one trans

or gender-diverse person in your life. Maybe they have not chosen to publicly change their gender identity. Maybe they feel that they cannot. Maybe they were assigned a different gender at birth to the one you know them as. Gender identity can be a core and unique part of a person's identity, and this is not a scary thing. A society that lets everyone display their gender identity as they choose is a happier society. I have seen the way gender euphoria and trans joy can light up a person in a room. Gender is fun. It is there for all of us to explore and celebrate.

To let everyone feel comfortable by being themselves, there are few small things that we can all do to signal that everyone is free to express their gender identity however they choose. Checking in on what someone's preferred pronouns are or using gender-neutrals when you do not know is very easy. It can be a very supportive gesture to let someone know that they are in a welcoming space. Start by giving your own pronouns. Using gender-neutral language in other contexts, like acknowledging that not everyone who menstruates or can get pregnant is a woman, does not devalue women but can be very helpful language for trans men and other gender-diverse folk assigned female at birth, particularly when they are navigating healthcare systems. Let's be clear, language changes alone will not fix systematic and systemic discrimination faced by trans people, particularly in regressing jurisdictions like Queensland and the US. Acknowledging that we cannot be complacent just because we have not fallen to the lows of these places, now is the time to show all forms of solidarity with the trans and gender-diverse community.

If I could say one thing to all members of this place as we approach Trans Day of Visibility, please do everything you can to actively support and engage with your trans and gender-diverse constituents. I trust that you will. Let them know that you stand with them. Let them know that Canberra is a safe place for all LGBTIQ+ communities and that it will also always remain so. Trans women are women. Trans men are men. Non-binary and all other gender-diverse people are valid in their identities, and trans rights are human rights.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

The Assembly adjourned at 6.19 pm.