

**PROOF**

**Hansard**

**LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY**

**60th Parliament**

**Tuesday 18 February 2025**



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**Tuesday 18 February 2025**

**The SPEAKER (Maree Edwards) took the chair at 12:04 pm, read the prayer and made an acknowledgement of country.**

*Condolences***Carole Frances Marple**

**The SPEAKER (12:05):** I advise the house of the death of Carole Frances Marple, member of the Legislative Assembly for the district of Altona from 1992 to 1996. I ask members to rise in their places as a mark of respect to the memory of the deceased.

**Members stood in their places.**

**The SPEAKER:** Thank you, members. I will convey a message of sympathy from the house to the relatives of the late Carole Marple.

*Bills***Safe Patient Care (Nurse to Patient and Midwife to Patient Ratios) Amendment Bill 2025***Introduction and first reading*

**Mary-Anne THOMAS** (Macedon – Leader of the House, Minister for Health, Minister for Ambulance Services) (12:06): I move:

That I introduce a bill for an act to amend the Safe Patient Care (Nurse to Patient and Midwife to Patient Ratios) Act 2015 and for other purposes.

**Motion agreed to.**

**James NEWBURY** (Brighton) (12:06): I seek a brief explanation of the bill.

**Mary-Anne THOMAS** (Macedon – Leader of the House, Minister for Health, Minister for Ambulance Services) (12:06): This bill seeks to amend the Safe Patient Care (Nurse to Patient and Midwife to Patient Ratios) Act 2015 to establish new nurse- and midwife-to-patient ratios in specified public hospital settings.

**Read first time.**

**Ordered to be read second time tomorrow.**

**Help to Buy (Commonwealth Powers) Bill 2025***Introduction and first reading*

**Danny PEARSON** (Essendon – Minister for Economic Growth and Jobs, Minister for Finance) (12:07): I move:

That I introduce a bill for an act to adopt specified provisions of the Help to Buy Act 2024 of the Commonwealth, to refer legislative power of the state in the form of an amendment reference to the Parliament of the Commonwealth to make amendments to the Help to Buy Act 2024 of the Commonwealth, to make consequential amendments to other acts and for other purposes.

**Motion agreed to.**

**Jess WILSON** (Kew) (12:07): I seek an explanation of the bill.

**Danny PEARSON** (Essendon – Minister for Economic Growth and Jobs, Minister for Finance) (12:07): The Help to Buy (Commonwealth Powers) Bill 2025 adopts the Commonwealth Help to Buy Act 2024 to enable the Commonwealth to establish and operate its shared equity scheme, Help to Buy, in Victoria. The bill also makes amendments to the Duties Act 2000, the First Home Owner Grant and

Home Buyer Schemes Act 2000 and the Land Tax Act 2005 to clarify the interaction between HTB and certain Victorian entitlements, concessions and schemes available to homebuyers.

**Read first time.**

**Ordered to be read second time tomorrow.**

**Transport Legislation Amendment (Vehicle Sharing Scheme Safety and Standards) Bill 2025**

*Introduction and first reading*

**Gabrielle WILLIAMS** (Dandenong – Minister for Transport Infrastructure, Minister for Public and Active Transport) (12:08): I move:

That I introduce a bill for an act to amend the Road Safety Act 1986 in relation to vehicle-sharing schemes and offences involving electric scooters and the Transport (Compliance and Miscellaneous) Act 1983 in relation to vehicle-sharing schemes and for other purposes.

**Motion agreed to.**

**Matthew GUY** (Bulleen) (12:09): I seek a brief explanation of the bill.

**Gabrielle WILLIAMS** (Dandenong – Minister for Transport Infrastructure, Minister for Public and Active Transport) (12:09): The bill seeks to amend the Transport (Compliance and Miscellaneous) Act 1983 and the Road Safety Act 1986 to deliver on government commitments to improving e-scooter safety and compliance by introducing a preapproval obligation on operators of vehicle sharing schemes, setting minimum safety requirements and standards on operators and enabling protective services officers to issue infringement notices in relation to e-scooter offences.

**Read first time.**

**Ordered to be read second time tomorrow.**

**Victorian Bank Levy (Tax the Major Banks) Bill 2025**

*Introduction*

**Ellen SANDELL** (Melbourne) (12:10): I move:

That I introduce a bill for an act to impose a levy on authorised deposit-taking institutions liable to pay the levy under the Major Bank Levy Act 2017 of the Commonwealth and for other purposes.

We need to be able to introduce this bill today because the big banks are making mega profits while everyday Victorians are struggling to make ends meet. In the last full financial year alone the big banks made about \$36.5 billion in combined profits. Just six days ago the Commonwealth Bank reported a \$5.3 billion profit in just six months. These are eye-watering figures that are so far removed from the everyday lives of Victorians, and this bill will ensure that the big banks will return a small portion of those super profits back to Victorians, which can then be put towards tackling the cost of living, increasing services and improving Victorians' lives.

It is actually urgent in this cost-of-living crisis that we debate this bill now, because we are about to go into a state budget which we are being told will be very tough. We are being told that the government is unlikely to be able to fix communities' crumbling public schools or to upgrade their train stations. We are being told that health services cannot be fixed, even those that we have heard have leaking or collapsing roofs. There are people sleeping rough on the streets of Melbourne and Victoria while the government cannot seem to afford to invest in public housing. Many people in our state are struggling to keep up with rent and mortgage payments. They are getting less and less for their dollar at the supermarket, and they are choosing whether to run their heating and cooling or to afford their rent or their food. That is why, given the urgency of this, given everything that social services are telling us about the urgency of the cost-of-living crisis, it is urgent that this bill, to put a tax on the big banks, must be introduced into Parliament today.

What we are proposing is a very modest tax based on a model proposed by in fact the former South Australian Labor government. It was blocked by the Liberals and other conservatives in the South Australian upper house.

**Katie Hall:** On a point of order, Speaker, this is a procedural debate, and the member appears to be debating her bill.

**The SPEAKER:** While I will allow the member for Melbourne to briefly outline the bill, I do ask her to speak to it being in fact a procedural motion as to why this bill should be introduced.

**Ellen SANDELL:** This is what I am outlining – the urgency as to why this needs to be debated now as opposed to some unspecified time in the future. It is something the Greens have brought into public debate before, but we have chosen today to put it on the table to be debated because of the urgency of the cost-of-living crisis. As I outlined, it is something that the South Australian Labor government had proposed, and so it is not something that is beyond the bounds of this Labor government to also support.

The other reason that it is urgent is because of the mega profits that the banks are making. The South Australian Treasurer at the time said the major banks were undertaxed, and that sounds about right to me. They were not able to get it done there, but I hope that we can get it done here in Victoria. The banks certainly can afford it. I know that they will come out swinging. The banking lobby will not like it. They will come out with scare tactics. They will say it would move investment away from Victoria, but it is just simply not true, because the proposal is for a tax on a percentage of bank liabilities equal to Victoria's share of national GDP, not just on the Victorian liabilities or investments. So when the banking lobby comes out and inevitably rolls out their scare campaign, they are deliberately using disinformation, and I think Victorians can see through that, particularly right now in a cost-of-living crisis. I think Victorians know that when one single corporation can make more than \$5 billion of profit in just six months it can afford to pay a little bit more tax, and I think that they can afford for some of that tax to go towards the things that we know Victorians need. The Parliamentary Budget Office estimates the levy would raise just over \$16.5 billion over the next decade. Imagine what we could do with those funds.

The government says that we are about to go into a budget – and that is another reason why it is urgent – where the government says it is going to have very little money to support the things that Victorians need and everyone is probably going to have to tighten their belt. Well, we would not necessarily need to do that quite so much if we actually taxed the huge, huge profits of these corporations.

The other reason it is urgent is that the RBA today is making a decision about interest rates again. We have seen successive interest rate rises that have hurt not only people trying to afford their mortgages but also renters that are then having their rents increased because of those interest rate rises, or that is what landlords are telling them. That is another reason why this bill must urgently be debated today.

**Katie HALL (Footscray) (12:15):** I am no constitutional lawyer, but I believe that the member for Melbourne's proposal is squarely in the remit of the Commonwealth government – yet another unfortunate stunt by the Greens.

We see time and time again that the banks pass on costs to consumers. I am very proud to be part of a government that is doing real things, tangible things, that we can deliver to help Victorians with cost-of-living expenses. In my electorate of Footscray alone I know there has been more than a million dollars spent on the \$400 school saving bonus – \$400 per student at government schools, helping those families with the cost of uniforms, camps and textbooks. These are actual, real dollars back in the pockets of Victorians.

The member for Melbourne mentioned rental reforms. The protections this government has introduced for renters – more than 130 reforms – show the power of a government taking real action –

*Members interjecting.*

**The SPEAKER:** Order! There is too much audible conversation in the chamber.

**Katie HALL:** to support renters, rather than this sort of land of make-believe proposal that we have just heard from the member opposite. The default offer – I know that the member would have lots of apartment complexes in her electorate. We have made sure that we have the lowest electricity prices in the country because of real reform that we have delivered as a government. This is another tangible thing that we have delivered.

It feels kind of farcical to see the member for Melbourne talking about the remit of the Commonwealth government when there is so much going on in terms of reform from this government to help people with their everyday cost-of-living expenses, whether it is helping people with solar panels on their roofs to cut electricity costs, whether it is the \$400 school saving bonus, whether it is cutting the cost of getting from a regional centre down to Melbourne so that there is –

*Members interjecting.*

**The SPEAKER:** Order! I ask members to take their conversations outside of the chamber.

**Katie HALL:** equity in our public transport system or our reforms to support renters, which are the strongest in the nation. The member mentioned public housing. I am also very proud to be part of a government that is spending the largest amount in Australian history on building more social homes for Victorians to live in, because we know that at this time social and affordable housing is a real thing that we can tackle.

It is disappointing to see yet another stunt focused on the remit of the Commonwealth government, as we did with the supermarket prices issue that the former member for Prahran used to pursue in here. I reject the motion from the member for Melbourne.

**Tim READ** (Brunswick) (12:19): I thank the member for Footscray for her contribution, but I refer her to recent comments by the federal Treasurer Jim Chalmers, who has pointed out that it is within the remit of states to introduce taxes like this, and as the member for Melbourne pointed out, \$16 billion over 10 years would be a great help to this government. In fact that is one reason why it is urgent to debate this bill today, because we read recently of the closure or the pending closure of the colorectal and pelvic reconstruction service at the Children's hospital.

The closure of this service, which is very important to the small number of children born with rectal and intestinal abnormalities, is something that would not have to happen if the state was getting an injection of over \$1.6 billion a year due to a tax levied on the big banks, as outlined –

**Mary-Anne Thomas:** On a point of order, Speaker, seeking your guidance, this is a narrow procedural motion, and I am not quite sure what the member for Brunswick's contribution to date has to do with the need to introduce this bill at this time. I ask you to bring him back to the procedural matters before the house.

**The SPEAKER:** Order! The member for Brunswick was making a point; I do not uphold the point of order.

**Tim READ:** As I was saying, services of that sort would not have to close if we had more sources of revenue for the government. It is no secret that the government is in financial difficulty, that some of these problems are urgent. We think it is important that we bring to the house this week a developed idea for a new source of revenue, and given that the federal Treasurer has identified this as a legitimate area for states to raise revenue, we regard it as urgent that this be done. It is equally urgent because of the lack of public housing in the state. We all know – and this is something that has been developing over decades, the growing number of homeless and people at risk of homelessness over this time – that putting some of this money towards housing would be an urgent option and solution for those issues. I only have to point to schools in my electorate and many other deserving recipients of housing.



Returning to the bill, I think it is critical that the diminution, the shrinkage in the number of banks in Victoria that has occurred over my lifetime, with the closure of the state bank and many others, and the concentration of wealth in the big four and the super profits that they have been making do not go unnoticed and unaddressed by this house. Introducing this levy is a way of putting some of that revenue towards public benefit.

**Nina TAYLOR** (Albert Park) (12:22): The Greens political party are gilding the lily, stretching things a little bit too far, I might say, with regard to comments that the federal Treasurer may have made and trying to make them relevant here in a state Parliament. They are always trying to lean into Commonwealth matters – good on them, give it a crack – but really I think I was elected personally to represent the seat of Albert Park on state issues, so perhaps we should stay within that remit. I know there is a lot of discussion about interest rates et cetera, quite rightly, but as far as I am aware that is actually a Commonwealth matter. For the purposes of an efficiently run Parliament, we should stay within the remit of our state constitution – that is, a state constitution as opposed to a federal constitution. Bearing in mind that this is a procedural motion, I therefore do not wish to stray beyond the remit of what my prerogative is with regard to this debate, and that is to adhere to the program we have at hand on state matters. We know the Greens political party has form – it is all about philosophy not delivery. If only they could deliver something; that would be a newbie for the chamber.

Honestly, talking about social and affordable housing, we have record investment in that space – this is very much in the Labor DNA – because we want Victorians to have decent contemporary housing, contemporary landscaping and facilities and community spaces. I do not know why they do not want community spaces, I do not know why they do not want contemporary housing of good quality for fellow Victorians, why they block, block, block. Then of course when it comes to energy savings, if we are talking about cost of living, it has already been mentioned by my esteemed colleague about the Victorian default offer and the Victorian energy upgrades program. I have actually even been in public housing and have seen upgrades that our government made with regard to changing people over from gas to electricity. I have actually seen it myself, I have actually had chats, so how about that. And then of course there is the very successful solar rebate program, all about supporting the transition in Victoria and making sure that we make those necessary cost savings for the future for all Victorians.

I do want to reiterate that we are a state Parliament. We should adhere, dare I say, to state matters. On this procedural motion, let us move forward with the matters of the day that are relevant to this house.

**Bridget VALLENCE** (Evelyn) (12:25): It should be noted that these sorts of duties were abolished as part of the GST reforms with the Commonwealth. Lest there be any doubt, the Victorian Liberals and Nationals oppose the contents of the bill proposed by the Greens. But what we do support and appreciate is opposition members of Parliament having the ability to introduce bills and for them to be debated, so whilst we vehemently oppose what the Greens political party are pursuing, we do not oppose their ability to debate it.

**Dylan WIGHT** (Tarneit) (12:25): I am genuinely confused as to why we are in here this afternoon debating this procedural motion. It took me a little bit to get to the bottom of it, but from what I can tell, the Greens over there are proposing a levy on banks in Victoria so as to be able to build more projects, which is fantastic. I am assuming their political strategy is allowing us to build more projects with some extra revenue, more projects that they can oppose, because they have opposed every single thing that we have done. Whether it be new social and affordable housing, whether it be the West Gate Tunnel, every great thing that this government does that lot opposes.

I tell you what, it is also a pretty bold move to bring this policy up today of all days, because sitting here in my seat here just flicking through my phone doing a little bit of research, this is a policy that was dreamed up by the former member for Prahran. About this time last year he ran it out through the papers. I would have thought that today of all days –

**Ellen Sandell:** On a point of order, Speaker, the member is misleading the house. It was actually me who introduced it first, and I do not think women should be ignored in that way.

**The SPEAKER:** That is not a point of order, member for Melbourne.

**Dylan WIGHT:** The member for Melbourne can tell us all she likes about what she may have said in her caucus meeting, but this article in the *Age* from about a year ago refers to ‘Greens economic justice spokesperson Sam Hibbins’. I am not in the Greens tactics meetings, but I would have thought it was a pretty bold move, after just losing a by-election in Prahran, to come in here and regurgitate the former member’s policy positions. But you know, good on you.

Those that have come before me and made contributions to this debate have rightly said that this is an area for the federal government, and indeed it is. In fact the federal government has recently – as in, like, two weeks ago – proposed a \$350 million levy on the banks, because it is in their remit. It is their job. If the member for Melbourne is so desperate to be a federal member of Parliament, then she should go and have a transitional conversation with Adam Bandt and run for the federal seat of Melbourne when he decides to leave. That would be my advice to the member for Melbourne. If you are so keen on talking about federal issues, go and have a conversation with your federal leader and get a transitional agreement in place and then run for the seat of Melbourne. Do not come in here and waste the Victorian Parliament’s time talking about things that belong in the federal Parliament.

As I said, this is a federal issue. Indeed federal Labor have done a lot in this space over a long period of time. We can go all the way back to the mid 1980s and the deregulation of the banking system, ensuring competitiveness in that system that was not there before. This is an absolute waste of our time. We should be just about up to the government business program now, talking about things that this Parliament can do for working Victorians.

**Assembly divided on motion:**

*Ayes (3):* Gabrielle de Vietri, Tim Read, Ellen Sandell

*Noes (79):* Juliana Addison, Jacinta Allan, Brad Battin, Jade Benham, Roma Britnell, Colin Brooks, Josh Bull, Tim Bull, Martin Cameron, Anthony Carbines, Ben Carroll, Anthony Cianflone, Annabelle Cleeland, Sarah Connolly, Chris Couzens, Chris Crewther, Jordan Crugnale, Lily D’Ambrosio, Daniela De Martino, Steve Dimopoulos, Paul Edbrooke, Wayne Farnham, Eden Foster, Will Fowles, Matt Fregon, Ella George, Luba Grigorovitch, Sam Groth, Matthew Guy, Bronwyn Halfpenny, Katie Hall, Paul Hamer, Martha Haylett, Mathew Hilakari, David Hodgett, Melissa Horne, Natalie Hutchins, Emma Kealy, Sonya Kilkenny, Nathan Lambert, Gary Maas, Alison Marchant, Kathleen Matthews-Ward, Tim McCurdy, Steve McGhie, Cindy McLeish, Paul Mercurio, John Mullahy, James Newbury, Danny O’Brien, Michael O’Brien, Kim O’Keeffe, Danny Pearson, John Pesutto, Pauline Richards, Tim Richardson, Richard Riordan, Brad Rowswell, Michaela Settle, David Southwick, Ros Spence, Nick Staikos, Natalie Suleyman, Meng Heang Tak, Jackson Taylor, Nina Taylor, Kat Theophanous, Mary-Anne Thomas, Bill Tilley, Bridget Vallenge, Emma Vulin, Peter Walsh, Iwan Walters, Vicki Ward, Kim Wells, Dylan Wight, Gabrielle Williams, Belinda Wilson, Jess Wilson

**Motion defeated.**

*Business of the house*

**Notices of motion and orders of the day**

**The SPEAKER (12:35):** General business, notices of motion 30 to 32 and orders of the day 5 to 8, will be removed from the notice paper unless members wishing their matter to remain advise the Clerk in writing before 5 pm today.

*Petitions***Animal care and protection legislation**

**Emma KEALY** (Lowan) presented a petition bearing 40 signatures:

**Issue:**

这份由维多利亚州关注的居民发起的请愿书，向议会提请注意，工党政府的《动物护理与保护法》将导致唐人街及其他维多利亚州餐厅失去获取新鲜本地海鲜和猪肉产品的机会，从而对与食物相关的传统和文化产生重大影响

This petition of residents in Victoria draws to the attention of the Legislative Assembly concerns that the Labor Government's Animal Care and Protection Bill will lead to the loss of access to fresh and local seafood and pork products in Chinatown and other Victorian restaurants, having a significant impact through the loss of tradition and culture related to food.

**Action:**

因此，请愿者请求维多利亚州立法议会呼吁艾伦工党政府保护将海鲜饲养在水族箱中的传统，并保持获取新鲜维多利亚猪肉产品的机会

The petitioners therefore request that the Legislative Assembly calls on the Allan Labor Government to preserve the tradition of housing seafood in aquariums and maintaining access to fresh Victorian pork products.

**Ordered that petition be considered tomorrow.**

**Edgecombe Road–Melville Drive, Kyneton**

**Mary-Anne THOMAS** (Macedon) presented a petition bearing 1163 signatures:

**Issue:**

This petition of residents in Victoria draws to the attention of the Legislative Assembly the dangerous intersection of Edgecombe Road and Melville Drive Kyneton. Edgecombe Road is a B-Double and heavy vehicle (Higher Mass Limit) route with heavy transports using the road daily. Melville Drive is a short government road off Edgecombe Road to the east, continuing as an internal road (common property) on a Cluster Subdivision (CS1134) of 126 lots. Users of 120 lots regularly use access via the intersection which is the only means of ingress and egress to the 107 residential dwellings and other buildings either individually owned or part of a time share. An unofficial traffic count on 5.5.2023 indicated 1,636 traffic movements in the vicinity of the intersection. There were 4 accidents, 3 of which were major, at the intersection between 2019 and 2023, one of which required a person to be hospitalised for some time.

**Action:**

The petitioners therefore request that the Legislative Assembly arrange to install a dedicated right turn lane immediately to the south of Melville Drive for north bound traffic on Edgecombe Road to access Melville Drive safely.

**Small-scale livestock farming**

**Martha HAYLETT** (Ripon) presented a petition bearing 2428 signatures:

**Issue:**

This petition of residents in Victoria draws to the attention of the Legislative Assembly the small-scale livestock farmers in Victoria are facing a devastating blow as Hardwicks (owned by Chinese multinational Kilcoy), has announced it will close its doors to service kills on 1 February 2025. This will decimate small-scale livestock farming and access to local meat in Victoria.

**Action:**

The petitioners therefore request that the Legislative Assembly

- 1) That the Victorian Government urgently implement Recommendation 27 of the Parliamentary Inquiry into Securing the Victorian Food Supply
- 2) That the Victorian Government apply the standards set out in AS4464:2007 the Australian Standard for the Hygienic Production of Wild Game Meat for Human Consumption, which could be safely applied

to domestic livestock, enabling them to be slaughtered on farm, chilled and inspected, and subsequently transferred to a licensed butcher for further processing.

This would support the survival of small-scale livestock farmers.

### *Committees*

#### **Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee**

##### *Alert Digest No. 2*

**Gary MAAS** (Narre Warren South) (12:37): I have the honour the present to the house a report from the Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee, being *Alert Digest No. 2* of 2025, on the following bills and subordinate legislation:

Constitution Amendment (Abortion) Bill 2024

Energy and Land Legislation Amendment (Energy Safety) Bill 2025

Regulatory Legislation Amendment (Reform) Bill 2025

SR No. 40 – Subordinate Legislation (Forest (Fire Protection) Regulations 2014) Extension Regulations 2024

SR No. 66 – Honorary Justices Regulations 2024

SR No. 83 – Supreme Court (Chapter I Costs Amendment) Rules 2024

Dairy Food Safety Victoria Determination of Licence Classes and Fees for Dairy Businesses

together with appendices.

**Ordered to be published.**

### *Documents*

#### **Documents**

#### **Incorporated list as follows:**

**DOCUMENTS TABLED UNDER ACTS OF PARLIAMENT** – The Clerk tabled:

*Education and Care Services National Law Act 2010* – Education and Care Services National Amendment Regulations 2024 under s 303

*Land Acquisition and Compensation Act 1986* – Certificate under s 7

Ombudsman – Support when children are sexually abused at school: The Department of Education’s response to abuse in a Victorian primary school – Released on 13 February 2025

*Planning and Environment Act 1987* – Notices of approval of amendments to the following Planning Schemes:

Greater Geelong – C452

Mitchell – GC234

Mount Alexander – C94

Strathbogie – GC234

Statutory Rule 1 under the *Food Act 1984*

**PROCLAMATION** – Under SO 177A, the Clerk tabled the following proclamation fixing an operative date:

*Melbourne Convention and Exhibition Trust Amendment Act 2024* – Whole act – 5 February 2025 (*Gazette S29 4 February 2025*).

*Bills***Drugs, Poisons and Controlled Substances Amendment (Paramedic Practitioners) Bill 2024****Statute Law Repeals Bill 2024***Council's agreement*

**The SPEAKER** (12:39): I have received a message from the Legislative Council agreeing to the following bills without amendment: the Drugs, Poisons and Controlled Substances Amendment (Paramedic Practitioners) Bill 2024 and the Statute Law Repeals Bill 2024.

**Drugs, Poisons and Controlled Substances Amendment (Paramedic Practitioners) Bill 2024****Education and Training Reform Amendment Bill 2024****Statute Law Repeals Bill 2024***Royal assent*

**The SPEAKER** (12:39): I inform the house that the Governor has given royal assent to the Drugs, Poisons and Controlled Substances Amendment (Paramedic Practitioners) Bill 2024, the Education and Training Reform Amendment Bill 2024 and the Statute Law Repeals Bill 2024.

**Energy and Land Legislation Amendment (Energy Safety) Bill 2025****Regulatory Legislation Amendment (Reform) Bill 2025***Appropriation*

**The SPEAKER** (12:40): I have received messages from the Governor recommending appropriations for the purposes of the Energy and Land Legislation Amendment (Energy Safety) Bill 2025 and the Regulatory Legislation Amendment (Reform) Bill 2025.

*Committees***Integrity and Oversight Committee***Membership*

**The SPEAKER** (12:40): I have received the resignation of Dylan Wight from the Integrity and Oversight Committee effective from today.

**Mary-Anne THOMAS** (Macedon – Leader of the House, Minister for Health, Minister for Ambulance Services) (12:40): I move, by leave:

That Eden Foster be a member of the Integrity and Oversight Committee.

**Motion agreed to.**

*Motions***Motions by leave**

**David SOUTHWICK** (Caulfield) (12:40): I move, by leave:

That, following the vile antisemitic incident in a New South Wales hospital, the Allan Labor government conduct an urgent investigation into reports of hateful antisemitic materials being placed in Victorian hospitals.

**Leave refused.**

**David SOUTHWICK**: I move, by leave:

That this house condemns claims by those who have been responsible for weekly hateful protests in Melbourne that 'Victoria belongs to us' and reaffirms Victoria's bipartisan commitment that we are a multicultural, welcoming and safe society that belongs to everyone equally.

**Leave refused.**

**Gabrielle DE VIETRI** (Richmond) (12:41): I move, by leave:

That this house:

- (1) notes that the Victorian Labor government has declared that it stands with Israel, that the recent US proposal to take over Gaza and forcibly displace its 2 million inhabitants is a violation of international law that would amount to ethnic cleansing, that Israel has declared support for this US proposal and that Israel is continuing violent raids across the West Bank; and
- (2) calls on this Parliament to reverse its position and on the government to end all diplomatic, military and economic ties with Israel.

**Leave refused.*****Business of the house*****Program**

**Mary-Anne THOMAS** (Macedon – Leader of the House, Minister for Health, Minister for Ambulance Services) (12:42): I move:

That, under standing order 94(2), the orders of the day, government business, relating to the following bills be considered and completed by 5 pm on 20 February 2025:

Justice Legislation Amendment (Anti-vilification and Social Cohesion) Bill 2024

Regulatory Legislation Amendment (Reform) Bill 2025

Energy and Land Legislation Amendment (Energy Safety) Bill 2025.

We have before us an important government business program this week. In circumstances that we have not seen often in this place, we held over a very important bill for a second week to ensure that every member of this place has the opportunity to get on their feet and tell us exactly where they stand in relation to the implementation of anti-vilification legislation in this state. I want to say this: there is absolutely no doubt whatsoever that here in the state of Victoria we have seen an absolutely unacceptable increase in antisemitic behaviour. We have also seen an increase in Islamophobia. Recently two women were attacked at Epping plaza, and police are investigating this as a crime of prejudice. It is really important that this legislation be in this place today and that every member get up and tell us why they will be supporting the bill or to the contrary why they will not be supporting the bill despite the fact that we can all agree that right now we have too many hate crimes happening in this state and that hate speech is being enabled by those who stand to profit from it, including the big tech giants. It is an important bill, and it is an important sitting week because this will tell the people of Victoria just what those on the other side of the house really stand for, or as the case may be what they do not stand for. The Justice Legislation Amendment (Anti-vilification and Social Cohesion) Bill will be debated later this day.

The Regulatory Legislation Amendment (Reform) Bill 2025 is also an important bill. There are a number of areas of government that it attends to, including ensuring that we continue to support the cultural rights of First Nations community, that we strengthen the safety of Victorian residents, we improve processes for environmental protections and we enable families to connect – those who were the victims of forced adoptions in this state.

I will just take a moment to reflect that it was previous minister Jill Hennessy – I might say, at the urging of both me and the former member for Yan Yean – that established and then the member for St Albans who led an inquiry into forced adoptions in this state, so it is very satisfying to be in this place and see the work that was commenced some time ago come before this place. We are making real legislative changes. I know this is an issue that the member for Eureka feels very strongly about as well. That bill makes amendments to 14 acts of Parliament, so it is an important omnibus bill.

Finally, we will be debating the Energy and Land Legislation Amendment (Energy Safety) Bill 2025. Everyone in this place knows that in the member for Mill Park we have the most consequential energy

minister that this nation has ever seen. In her time as the minister for energy the member for Mill Park has completely transformed energy in this state, and we are now well placed to head into the future with secure, reliable and affordable renewable energy, all delivered by the member for Mill Park as part of this historic Andrews and Allan Labor government. I want to commend the minister for the extraordinary work that she has done, and she does not tire when it comes to this very necessary transformation of our energy supply, energy transmission and energy markets. The bill acquits commitments that our government made to making sure that safety of the energy system is always maintained at the highest level, and it acquits part of that commitment by ensuring that Energy Safe Victoria is able to adapt to the transition from fossil fuels to renewable energy and that Energy Safe Victoria can maintain its position as a strong and effective regulator.

We have a very important government business program to debate this week, and I know that it is always members on this side of the house that are champing at the bit to get up on their feet and speak to their values and outline to the people of Victoria why they will be supporting these bills. We look to the other side to see if we will get any ideas from them or whether, as usual, it will be ‘No, no, no’ to the legislation, which is actually designed to advance the interests of all Victorians, no matter where they live. I commend the government business program to the house.

**Bridget VALLENCE** (Evelyn) (12:48): I rise to make a contribution on the government business program. I thank the Leader of the House for the explanation that she has provided of the government business program, but I regret to inform the house that we do not share the same approach as the government on their legislative program for this week and will be opposing the government business program. The principal reason why the opposition will be opposing the government business program is because we had sought from the government to go into consideration in detail on certain bills. The Leader of the House just asked the question: will the opposition be champing at the bit to talk about these bills? Absolutely. That is precisely why we asked to go into consideration in detail: to further scrutinise the bills that the Labor government is putting forward. But did they agree to do that? No, they did not. They denied that very simple request. Anyone would say that increased transparency is something that the Victorian people would like, but unfortunately the Labor government shut down that request.

The Justice Legislation Amendment (Anti-Vilification and Social Cohesion) Bill 2024 we know was on the government business program last sitting week, but the Labor government went into hiding and took it off the guillotine. It is now back on this week. It was listed on the notice paper again for further debate. If there was ever a bill that deserved to be put under further consideration in detail, this bill surely is most deserving. It is a bill that has been the subject of considerable debate in the community, and there have been genuine concerns raised by community members and by members of the Liberal and National opposition in debate last sitting week about whether the new defence which will be introduced by the Labor government at the last minute – the new political defence – will actually undermine the principal purpose of the bill and allow religious and racial vilification to continue in the state of Victoria. It would be absolutely shameful for the Labor government to deliver on that.

As I have said previously, we on this side of the house consider there is merit in having the opportunity to scrutinise bills put before this house. We do not think this Parliament should be treated as a mere rubberstamping exercise by the Labor government, and it is a pity the government does not share this view. It should be remembered that the opposition and crossbench members have only had two weeks notice of these bills and one of those was a sitting week, so we need to be able to have the opportunity to go into consideration in detail on some of these critical bills, particularly when there are questions unanswered by the government through the bill briefing process. Given the limited opportunity we on this side of the house have been provided with to consult with key stakeholders and the lack of opportunity to go into consideration in detail and considering the particular attitudes to the proposed changes of many members of the community, we think there should be an opportunity to question the government further about their motives – about why they have introduced these bills in the first place, about some of the fees and charges proposed in some of these bills, about some of the very

questionable provisions that the government has in these bills and about how they will impact on everyday Victorians.

Over the last couple of weeks I have had the privilege of speaking with many people in the Prahran electorate and in St Kilda, Wyndham and Werribee. The common issue that we keep hearing on this side of the house is that, in terms of this Labor government, the people in Werribee, in Wyndham, in Prahran, in St Kilda and in Windsor are no longer listening to this government. They are sick and tired of this government, and it was known further from the results. The vote in those two by-elections should be telling for this government: that we have listened loud and clear to those people, that they want more consultation on the legislation that this government is introducing and that these people in these electorates, and in fact people right across Victoria, deserve to be listened to. They do not want to be taken for granted by this Labor government anymore.

In terms of the Energy and Land Legislation Amendment (Energy Safety) Bill 2025 that will be introduced by this government, it seeks to make many significant changes, including abolishing a couple of consultative committees – again an effort to limit transparency by this Labor government – which is precisely why we want to go into consideration in detail. We may move some amendments on that bill because we want to make sure that Victorians are not punished by this Labor government, that they are not worse off from the increased fees and charges and by the limiting of scrutiny and transparency by this Labor government.

**Tim RICHARDSON** (Mordialloc) (12:53): It is great to rise on the government business program and to follow the member for Evelyn, who gave a great commentary around things outside of the government business program. I just did not want to call a point of order acknowledging the commentary and the leadership change during that time and how significant that was and that half the time they were in a position where they were listening to themselves rather than Victorians.

But I come to the government business program and its significance this week. The anti-vilification laws are really important. We see once again a really important community discussion. I will be fascinated and really intrigued to hear some of the commentary and speeches that will come forward this week in this Parliament. I am up on this bill as well. We have seen the opposition in different frames on this bill: opposed, talking down the bill, asking for different things to change, like moving reasoned amendments, which I will come to in a moment. Where exactly is their prism on reducing the risk of vilification of people in our community? It is a really important frame. I am hoping that every member of Parliament on that side will do their communities justice and speak on this bill, put it forward and have a discussion, rather than just the consistent well-worn path of reasoned amendments.

We played reasoned amendment bingo last week. We saw how many pieces of legislation would have significant amendments or simply reasoned amendments that said to push the bill off for months and consult. Some of those things last week were interesting because some of the reasoned amendments suggested that there was not enough consultation and others suggested that there was too much – too much delay, too much impact – and we should go back and consult again. When they call for time on consideration in detail and there are literally two sentences offered up on feedback on a bill post the shadow minister's lead speech, it does not really lend itself to the depth and the engagement that is required in this Parliament.

When we are talking about time and bandwidth – and I think there is roughly 30 hours of time we have as part of a sitting week – if you look at what the contributions are and how many shadows speak, once again we see a consistent theme. We see a lack of contribution to bill speeches once again.

I would not say that about the junior coalition party. The Nationals do carry a large load. I think you would have seen that if you are a real big fan of *Hansard*. I know sometimes the volumes are sent to the office and you might have a look at them. You will see a consistent theme. They are a junior partner in that coalition, but they carry a heavy load. I am just wondering when some of the Liberals on that



side might actually start to put their name on the speakers list and not just put forward their Nationals colleagues. The Shadow Treasurer is here. He is not speaking as much as he often does. I think he is making sure that he is across his brief on Treasury and going through that. But let us front up to the fact that there is a really important part of democracy here that is the contribution of the opposition and government members to how bills are commented on and find their way into the upper house, and the bandwidth that is given to time and discussion and debate is really critical to that as well.

This government business program builds on some of the great work and legacy of the Allan Labor government. We see the next iteration of legislation coming forward with the Justice Legislation Amendment (Anti-vilification and Social Cohesion) Bill 2024, and there will be discussion around that; the Energy and Land Legislation Amendment (Energy Safety) Bill 2025, relating to Energy Safe and some of the regulations that have come forward and improvements there; and the Regulatory Legislation Amendment (Reform) Bill 2025 as well. Again, it is a full program of output.

One of the tasty morsels I am looking for this week, though, Speaker – and I think you will be there on Wednesday afternoon – is the matter of public importance. The opposition have the MPI coming forward this week. We want to see the constructive, collaborative, visionary policy and discussion that will be put forward, what tasks, what things –

*Members interjecting.*

**Tim RICHARDSON:** The member for Brighton asks if I am up. I will just say I might be getting a few runs away; I might be on the list this week. If the member for Brighton is asking, then I think the member for Brighton might have the MPI. We will see how we go.

It is a really important discussion around what is coming forward, what the narrative is and what is being put forward by those opposite, because at the moment it is low-altitude flying. We have reasoned amendment after reasoned amendment rather than offering up substantive amendments. Then if we vote down their reasoned amendment, they let bills sail through, which I think is the laziest form of shadow ministry work you could ever have. Come forward with ideas, policies and rationales in those debates and then get on the speakers list. One of the fundamental roles in this place is to actually front up and talk on behalf of your community. If you are knocking out one every two months as your bill speech contribution, it is just not enough and it is not being serious as a parliamentarian in this place.

**Martin CAMERON (Morwell) (12:58):** It is great to be back this week. I rise to talk on the government business program. As we have articulated this week we will be opposing the government business program for many reasons. As the member for Mordialloc just said, we are quite happy to stand up in the chamber and talk on all of these subjects that actually affect Victorians and also affect the people in our own electorates.

One of the bills, which is on for a second week in a row, is the Justice Legislation Amendment (Anti-vilification and Social Cohesion) Bill 2024, which I did get up and talk on last week. I think we are strong in the opinion that this bill does not go far enough. That is why we are opposing it. Our Shadow Attorney-General put forward amendments that need to happen, because we do not want loopholes for people so that when we go and make these changes they are not going to make any difference. We do not want to be part of something that is going to cause grief and then be back again in a month's time or six months time having to change the legislation again. We are here so we can stop these people that use hate speech on the streets. That is why we put these amendments up and we are so strong and getting up and talking on that subject.

The Regulatory Legislation Amendment (Reform) Bill 2025 is another one. As was said, it is an omnibus bill. What happens in there – and I am just starting to get my head around it – is that we get a lot of bits and pieces which are good in these omnibus bills, but then we get the sneaky passage of a couple of other bits and pieces that need to be pulled up and spoken about.

While we may agree with 70 to 80 per cent – maybe 90 per cent sometimes – of these bills, that last little 10 per cent needs to be called out because we do not want to send these bills on their way when they are not right and we are going to be back again in 12 months discussing these sneaky bills again.

The Energy and Land Legislation Amendment (Energy Safety) Bill 2025 is up. We heard about how wonderful the member for Mill Park is and her visionary ways of turning to renewables at a rapid rate and how they are going to be life changing for so many Victorians. We are at the stage now where we need to be conscious that the timeline for when our coal-fired power stations are shutting is coming up rapidly. Yallourn starts to shut in 2028, so the clock is ticking. We need to make sure that we do discuss these regulations and the legislation that needs to be done, but we need to dive into the detail and make sure that we are not making a rod for our own back into the future.

Last sitting week when we were here in the chamber the Shadow Attorney-General raised a private members bill regarding bail, because this is the number one issue on the streets in my electorate and what we need to be concentrating on. The Premier stood in this place and said ‘We will have a review of the bail laws’ and then we get to today and there is nothing on bail laws here, which we need to be able to talk about. That is a fault of the government. We should be fast-tracking so that we can talk on these incredibly important bills, one being making sure that the bail laws are much more stringent and make it harder to put criminals back out on the street. They do have the blueprint. The Shadow Attorney-General put up the blueprint for the government to follow. When we do get that back in, it will be interesting to see as we go line by line how many of the recommendations of our Shadow Attorney-General are in there.

Only a couple of weeks ago Harry Wright, who was a constituent of mine, was killed in his home in an aggravated burglary down in the Latrobe Valley. These are constant things for families that I have got to talk to, and these are the issues that they want addressed. They want tougher, stringent bail laws. All it shows is the Labor government cannot manage money and cannot manage our safety.

**Dylan WIGHT** (Tarneit) (13:03): It gives me great pleasure this afternoon to rise in support of the government business program, and what a fantastic government business program it is. It is also fantastic to follow my friend from Morwell, the member for Morwell, and his contribution, although I am slightly confused. We had the Manager of Opposition Business earlier, as part of her contribution, talking about the need for reasoned amendments and the need for amendments to our legislation so we can undertake more community consultation. I make the point on anti-vilification that I think it was three to four months in terms of consultation. I would think that that was sufficient, but now we have the member for Morwell saying that we need to fast-track our legislation. We announced a review two weeks ago and we should have legislation before the Parliament already. I am not quite sure which one it is, but it is indeed confusing.

As I said, I am rising in support of the government business program, as you can imagine. What I will say is it is incredibly disappointing to have the opposition once again not support the government business program, particularly today when we have such an important piece of legislation on the government business program, and that is the anti-vilification legislation. Further to that disappointment, not only do they not support the government business program but they do not support the legislation. We can talk about community consultation. I can tell you now that I have consulted with my community, a community that is disproportionately affected by vilification and by hate speech in this state.

I have gone and consulted with my community, and they say that this is an incredibly important piece of legislation. Whether that be the disabled community in Tarneit and Hoppers Crossing or indeed whether that be our multicultural community, it is important legislation so that young people in my community, young schoolkids, are not affected by hate speech.

This is a real test for this opposition. Indeed –

**Bridget Vallence:** On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, this is a narrow procedural debate on the government business program, not an opportunity to actually go into debate on the bill. I think the current speaker is seeking to debate a bill and not speak to the government business program. I would ask you to ask him to get back to the government business program.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** I can rule on the point of order. The motion is a procedural debate. However, members are able to put context to their agreement or otherwise of the government business program.

**Dylan WIGHT:** As I was saying, this is a massive test for the opposition. It is, I believe, the first test for this new opposition. Do they want to stand with us –

**James Newbury:** On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, this is a tight procedural debate, and what the member is doing is seeking to sledge the opposition rather than deal with the substantive motion before the house. This is just grubby politics on a procedural motion. There has to be a line.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** I am not sure it can be a substantive motion and a procedural debate at the same time. The member needs to bring his context in regard to the government business program. Most members have given context.

**Dylan WIGHT:** Seriously, how embarrassing. The proverbial sausage fest that is the Victorian Liberal Party has one woman –

**James Newbury:** On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, this is just cheap, nasty politics from the government and from this speaker.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** The point of order is?

**James Newbury:** On relevance. There has to be a line where the government's behaviour is called out.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** That is a matter for debate, although I will caution the member for Tarnet. He was getting close to unparliamentary language there, and I ask him to come back to the rules of the house.

**Dylan WIGHT:** Let the Manager of Opposition Business do her job. You do not have to undermine her at every single opportunity.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Through the chair, member for Tarnet. It is early in the week. Let us be civil.

**Dylan WIGHT:** As I was saying, this is an opportunity for the opposition to stand with us in stamping out hate speech and supporting – *(Time expired)*

**Chris CREWITHER (Mornington) (13:08):** I rise today to speak on the government business program, which includes, as noted, the Regulatory Legislation Amendment (Reform) Bill 2025, the Energy and Land Legislation Amendment (Energy Safety) Bill 2025 and the Justice Legislation Amendment (Anti-vilification and Social Cohesion) Bill 2024.

This is the second time the anti-vilification bill has been in the government business program. It was originally, in the last sitting week a fortnight ago, up for debate and vote, but then the government changed their business program to only debate it last sitting week, seemingly because of all the uproar about it from so many community groups and organisations, including the Australian Christian Lobby, Jewish groups and more. However, the government have seemingly tried to make out that they only ever intended to debate it in the first place last sitting week.

It seems the government does not have confidence in what it is doing. I do not have confidence in what the government is doing, nor do my colleagues have confidence in what the government is doing. That seems to be what is happening with the government at the moment with, for example, the Minister for

Police expressing confidence in the police chief commissioner and then 87 per cent of police voting no confidence, which saw the government quickly backflip. This shows a government out of touch after over 10 years in power, not knowing what its people want and trying to divert from its own failures, like with this government business program and with this anti-vilification bill in the government business program.

**Colin Brooks:** On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, it is a noble effort, but the honourable member is a long way from this debate.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** I will take that as a point of order on relevance. I will counsel the member for Mornington, similar to the member for Tarneit, that context is acceptable in regard to the government's business program but to please stay within the procedural debate.

**Chris CREWETHER:** Of course, Deputy Speaker. It is of course important to give context to this debate. But moving to the specific government business program that we are debating today, as the member for Evelyn pointed out, we are opposing this business program in its entirety. As the member for Evelyn pointed out as well, it is in part because there is less transparency from this government and they have sought to block us and have denied us having consideration in detail on certain bills and more.

If we go into what is happening under this business program this week, on the anti-vilification bill, I understand that the government will also table some amendments in this regard. This is, I understand, after further consultation has taken place, but this is consultation that should have taken place in the first place. And I understand that these amendments still will not go to addressing many of the concerns that have been raised by Jewish community groups, the ACL and many other constituents and more. The government should indeed go back to the drawing board on this bill, which is why we are opposing the bill itself under the government business program.

Then we move to the Energy and Land Legislation Amendment (Energy Safety) Bill 2025. This bill is pitched as a key reform to modernise energy safety laws in Victoria, yet it raises concerns about the broad, sweeping powers handed to regulators with the potential for excessive penalties – another example of big government regulation where tradies could be penalised for trying to do their jobs. While aspects of this bill, such as moving bushfire mitigation plans to a five-year cycle, have merit, the government's plan to axe advisory committees like the Electric Line Clearance Consultative Committee only reduces expert oversight and transparency.

The final bill on the government's business program is the Regulatory Legislation Amendment (Reform) Bill 2025. This is a huge omnibus bill proposing changes to 16 different acts across nine portfolios. Some changes are of course positive; some are negative. As the government likes to do with omnibus bills, they try and make the coalition look bad if we oppose positive things but equally try and make the coalition look bad if we support elements which go against our own philosophy. This is primarily an administrative bill. However, there are some concerns about new fees and charges around property transactions, Service Victoria's expanded fee-charging powers and various licensing provisions. We have a cost-of-living crisis, and this government seems hell-bent on increasing the cost of housing, rents and more with 57 – or is it 58 or more – new taxes introduced since they have been in government. We look at the Prahran and Werribee by-elections as well. This government is on the nose, and it is time they listened to the public.

#### **Assembly divided on motion:**

*Ayes (51):* Juliana Addison, Jacinta Allan, Colin Brooks, Josh Bull, Anthony Carbines, Ben Carroll, Anthony Cianflone, Sarah Connolly, Chris Couzens, Jordan Crugnale, Lily D'Ambrosio, Daniela De Martino, Steve Dimopoulos, Paul Edbrooke, Eden Foster, Matt Fregon, Ella George, Luba Grigorovitch, Bronwyn Halfpenny, Katie Hall, Paul Hamer, Martha Haylett, Mathew Hilakari, Melissa Horne, Natalie Hutchins, Sonya Kilkenny, Nathan Lambert, Gary Maas, Alison Marchant, Kathleen Matthews-Ward, Steve McGhie, Paul Mercurio, John Mullahy, Danny Pearson, Pauline

Richards, Tim Richardson, Michaela Settle, Ros Spence, Nick Staikos, Natalie Suleyman, Meng Heang Tak, Jackson Taylor, Nina Taylor, Kat Theophanous, Mary-Anne Thomas, Emma Vulin, Iwan Walters, Vicki Ward, Dylan Wight, Gabrielle Williams, Belinda Wilson

*Noes (31)*: Brad Battin, Jade Benham, Roma Britnell, Tim Bull, Martin Cameron, Annabelle Cleeland, Chris Crewther, Gabrielle de Vietri, Wayne Farnham, Will Fowles, Sam Groth, Matthew Guy, David Hodgett, Emma Kealy, Tim McCurdy, Cindy McLeish, James Newbury, Danny O'Brien, Michael O'Brien, Kim O'Keeffe, John Pesutto, Tim Read, Richard Riordan, Brad Rowswell, Ellen Sandell, David Southwick, Bill Tilley, Bridget Vallence, Peter Walsh, Kim Wells, Jess Wilson

**Motion agreed to.**

### *Members statements*

#### **Government performance**

**Matthew GUY** (Bulleen) (13:19): Recently I was doing some work at home and I noticed a tree had moved on the left side of my house, and it got me thinking. A few things have moved on the left of late. I thought to myself, given the Premier and her government are a train wreck, who on the left has moved in the Labor Party? Is it the unsighted Treasurer, who we have not seen for nine weeks? Has she moved off the Premier and gone to the Deputy Premier for his support? Is it the Minister for Education himself, who flunked the VCE introduction? Is it the Minister for Planning, who wants to put a million people in Melbourne but no-one else in her seat, the same minister who cannot even tighten up the bail laws? Is it indeed the Minister for Police, who will not talk to the media?

Which one from this train wreck of a government is moving off the Premier and supporting the Deputy Premier to roll the Premier by July? We know she will not last the winter in that job. We know the Premier is heading to be rolled by her own party.

*Members interjecting.*

**Matthew GUY**: You can laugh, but you are going to lose your seat.

**A member** interjected.

**Matthew GUY**: You can laugh, but you are going to lose your seat.

**Dylan Wight** interjected.

**Matthew GUY**: Oh, the one up the back, Tarneit – I cannot wait for that one. I have not finished yet, because I am also going to say: while you are at it, sack the Victorian Electoral Commission.

#### **St Francis Xavier School, Corio**

**Ella GEORGE** (Lara) (13:20): Last week I visited St Francis Xavier School in Corio to check out how work is progressing on their new administration building funded by the Allan Labor government. The new building will deliver a new reception area, a staffroom, offices, meeting rooms and a sick bay. I was proud to make an election commitment of \$2 million, and along with a contribution of \$1.9 million from the school this project is almost complete. Special thanks must go to year 6 school captains Flynn Gatt and Luke Jiminez, along with prep students Harper Pearson and Elly Salomon, for leading an excellent tour of the new building. Thanks also to principal Maria Scala, deputy principal Sheridan Sliwinski, bursar Katrina Benstead, the school's administrator Tahlia Tatlock and the entire community at the school, who have worked so hard to ensure that their vision for their school could be realised.

#### **Anakie Football and Netball Club**

**Ella GEORGE** (Lara) (13:21): Last Friday I was excited to join the federal member for Corio Richard Marles and the City of Greater Geelong to open the brand new netball courts at Anakie Reserve. Along with the new court, there are lights and player shelters. This project was completed

with funding from all three tiers of government and would not have been possible without the hard work and dedication of Heath Menhennet, the president of the Anakie Roos, and his dedicated group of volunteers. This project will cater for the growing number of netballers in the local community who are taking up the sport they love and will also benefit the entire Anakie community, who can get down to the club and enjoy the new courts. Well done to all involved. While I was there I also had the pleasure of meeting Leroy, the latest addition to the Trotter family and new club mascot. Thanks, Leroy, for the pats.

#### **Euroa electorate businesses**

**Annabelle CLEELAND** (Euroa) (13:22): I want to thank the local businesses that continue to invest in my electorate of Euroa. Their commitment drives our economy, creates jobs and keeps our towns thriving. Last week I sat down with some of these businesses to hear what it is like to operate in Victoria at the moment and understand the challenges they are facing.

I attended the opening of Western AG in Seymour, an incredible business providing agronomic advice across regional Victoria who chose Seymour and Benalla as key locations for growth. In Benalla I caught up with Ian at ForestOne, Greg and Joyleen at Ryan & McNulty and the team at Benalla Bus & Coach Lines, businesses that are the backbone of our local manufacturing, timber and transport industries. In Broadford I toured the Allen's lollies factory, which employs 240 people, including the impressive Emily Bradbury, who gave me a tour of the delicious production lines and even sent me home with some lollies to barter with my children.

Altogether these businesses employ more than 500 people. Five hundred families rely on these jobs to put food on the table during a cost-of-living crisis. That is 500 reasons to fight for businesses in regional Victoria. But doing business in Victoria has ever been tougher. Right now our state ranks dead last in the country for business conditions. WorkCover premiums are through the roof, Labor's taxes are crippling and rising crime is making it nearly impossible for businesses to keep up. These problems must be fixed, because the longer they wait, the more it costs our businesses, and our towns and our futures suffer. Business owners feel ignored by this government. On this side we stand with businesses that drive our economy, support communities and create opportunity.

#### **Footscray Hospital**

**Sarah CONNOLLY** (Laverton) (13:23): It was great to be down last week at the new Footscray Hospital and see firsthand the incredible work that is being done to deliver this state-of-the-art facility. At \$1.5 billion this is the biggest spend in Victorian history, and it is happening right here in Melbourne's west. When this hospital opens later this year it will have an increase of 200 beds and be able to treat an additional 15,000 patients each and every year. On top of that, the new hospital will allow for an additional 25,000 people to be seen by the emergency department. It is located right next to Vic Uni, which means if you are a nursing or a medical student doing a placement at the hospital you can cut between classes and walk through a brand new footbridge directly connecting the two, cementing the site as a major research and educational facility in addition to being a hospital. Even better, the new hospital, when open, will reduce wait times, including for elective surgeries and outpatient services.

This is not the hospital that our government is building or upgrading in Melbourne's west, but it is certainly the biggest. So if you want to see Labor delivering for the west, look no further than this state-of-the-art hospital that is opening its doors later this year to thousands of Victorians right across the western suburbs.

#### **Yarra Ranges community awards**

**Bridget VALLENCE** (Evelyn) (13:25): The Yarra Ranges community awards on Australia Day celebrated some outstanding contributions of volunteers in our community. Harry Moyle and Sue Thompson were jointly awarded the Mayor's Lifetime Achievement Award – two people who have had a great impact in our local community. Harry dedicated almost three decades to volunteering his

financial expertise to Caladenia Dementia Care in Mooroolbark and was instrumental in developing Caladenia's organisational direction and financial governance. Sue Thompson is a keen historian and local advocate, instrumental in forming the Lilydale museum – now the Yarra Ranges Regional Museum – ensuring local artefacts and photographs can be preserved for future generations. The community leadership award was presented to Eddie Tichelaar for his tireless and much-valued efforts supporting the Montrose community in a variety of ways, including through the township group and as a liaison for the road infrastructure upgrades, as a 45-year CFA volunteer firefighter and as an historian at the Montrose community cottage. Community Group of the Year Award was awarded to Holy Fools, with Neal Taylor and his dedicated team of volunteers hosting weekly community lunches and providing support packages to people experiencing homelessness. Environmental Achiever of the Year Debbie Shaw and Young Citizen of the Year Jarvis Lewis-James were recognised for their tremendous work in turning around the fortunes of Candlebark Community Nursery in Mooroolbark, with Debbie transforming the organisation by growing volunteer numbers and propagating indigenous plant species and Jarvis supporting bushland planting days along the Warburton trail, amongst other things. Congratulations all.

### **Carole Marple and Bob Fairclough**

**Luba GRIGOROVITCH** (Kororoit) (13:26): Melbourne's west recently lost two remarkable community champions with the passing of Carole Marple, the first elected member for the former seat of Altona, and Bob Fairclough, the former mayor of Wyndham and a dedicated advocate for his community.

Carole was the second member in Parliament that I met after the late Joan Kirner, and, like Joan, I thought Carole was absolutely tremendous. She served as the member for Altona from 1992 until 1996, and while her time in office was brief, Carole made a lasting impact, becoming a strong and passionate voice for her community. She was a tireless advocate for the environment, education and of course women's rights. During her time she served as Shadow Minister for Natural Resources and Shadow Minister for Agriculture and Rural Affairs. Carole was deeply loved by the people of Altona for her unwavering commitment to their needs and dedication to changing people's lives.

I had the great pleasure of meeting the late Bob Fairclough in 2008 when I was first elected to Hobsons Bay City Council. Bob was also a councillor, elected to Wyndham City Council, and he was a pillar of our community. A former mayor and councillor, a respected academic at Victoria University and an advocate for multiculturalism, Bob truly was a warrior for the people of Point Cook. In 2013 Bob was recognised with an Order of Australia Medal for his contributions to both the community and education.

Both Carole and Bob leave an enduring legacy of service, dedication and advocacy for their communities. Their contributions have shaped the west and will be remembered for many years. Vale, Carole and Bob. Your impact will not be forgotten.

### **Sandringham electorate schools**

**Brad ROWSWELL** (Sandringham) (13:28): Term 1 has kicked off, and I have been lucky enough to visit many of my local schools so far this year, as I do every year, to meet with the principals. Just last week I visited Mentone Primary School and met with principal Andrew Holmes and the deputy principal Ken Bergen. Mr Holmes is a new principal at Mentone Primary School and is doing very, very well there. Later that day I visited Mentone Girls' Secondary College and the principal Linda Brown. Over the next week I will be visiting 10 local schools, including Moorabbin Primary School, Sandringham Primary School, Beaumaris Primary School, Beaumaris North Primary School, Beaumaris Secondary College; Sandringham College, St Agnes' Primary School, Sacred Heart Parish School in Sandringham, Firbank junior school and Kilbreda College in Mentone. I am looking forward to meeting with each of those principals.

### Neighbourhood Watch Bayside

**Brad ROWSWELL** (Sandringham) (13:29): Last week, together with the president of Bayside Neighbourhood Watch Phil Lovell, I also visited businesses in Hampton to speak about the impacts of local crime on the community and their businesses. I was astounded to speak with a number of traders who have been impacted by the effects of local crime – burglaries, assaults, thefts from motor vehicles, of motor vehicles, thefts from shops – about the disturbance that it has not only on the community of Hampton but the broader community as well. I place on the record my thanks and appreciation to Victoria Police for everything that they have done, and we need the government to get their act together to keep our streets safe. Thank you to Phil and the entire Neighbourhood Watch Bayside team.

### Tarneit electorate schools

**Dylan WIGHT** (Tarneit) (13:29): Last week I had the pleasure of joining the Deputy Premier and Minister for Education Ben Carroll in opening Barayip Primary School in Tarneit. In my time as the member for Tarneit I have had the pleasure of opening up five brand new government schools: Karwan and Nearnung primary schools, Brinbeal Secondary College, Wimba Primary School and now Barayip Primary School as well.

During our visit the Deputy Premier and I were greeted by the enthusiastic school principal Nicole O'Brien, assistant principal Chloe Borg, as well as Indigenous artist Kobi Sainty, who had done some murals at the school. It was fantastic to see the school in full swing, with kids actively learning and playing in the beautiful buildings and outdoor spaces. I am confident that all the students here will have a wonderful time exploring, learning and growing.

As part of the Allan Labor government's commitment to supporting families and investing in education we have introduced the \$400 school saving bonus. This helps cover the cost of essential school items, like uniforms, camps and excursions, ensuring that every child has the opportunity to fully participate in the school experience. Another important initiative is the school breakfast club program, which provides free nutritious breakfasts to students right across Victoria. This program is already making a difference in many Tarneit schools by ensuring that no child starts the day hungry and that all students are ready to learn. I am really proud to be part of a government that prioritises such incredible resources for our kids, and I am looking forward to watching all the students – *(Time expired)*

### Nick Vittorio

**Kim O'KEEFFE** (Shepparton) (13:31): I was incredibly sad to hear of the passing of Nick Vittorio. Nick was a much-loved member of our community, as was his late wife Nina, who passed away last April. It was a dream come true for Nick and Nina when they opened their own small business the Casablanca pizza and pasta family restaurant back in 1971. For over 50 years in business and in the heart of the Shepparton CBD the Casablanca has stood the test of time because of Nick and Nina and their staff and customers, which were like family, and that is exactly how they made you feel.

I have such fond memories of Nick and Nina. When I was a teenager the Casa was always the go-to place after a night at Pinky's, Shakers or Tramps disco for late-night pizza, and it was the meeting place, as it still is for many today. When you visit the Casa there are many memories shared over the years, with photos of celebrities and famous people alike, because the Casa is an iconic local landmark and business. The business has continued to grow and remains one of our most successful much-loved businesses – a legacy which Nick and Nina's family will continue. Whilst making the pizzas Nick would always stick his head up to say hi with a wave and a smile, and Nina would always come to the table for a chat.

Nick was a hardworking man but also a wonderful family man. Nick is now reunited with his beautiful wife Nina. My sincere condolences to Tony and Josie, Maria and Richard, Nick's much-loved



grandchildren, extended family, the staff and the community. He will be missed by many. Vale, Nick. May you rest in peace.

#### **Public transport workforce**

**Jackson TAYLOR** (Bayswater) (13:32): I would like to give a big shout-out to all of the train drivers on the Belgrave line. Without fail each and every single time when my son George is waving away they will wave right back at him, and it blows his mind. I thought this was a great opportunity for me and my wife Tash to say a huge thankyou to the wonderful people who drive our trains, not just on the Belgrave line, who have had the great pleasure of seeing my son behind the windows, but also to all of the wonderful people on our trains, trams and buses in between and right across this state. I am very proud to be part of a government that gets on and builds, and of course I am very proud to have a wonderful workforce. I look forward to seeing more of the wonderful people on the Belgrave line, as does my son George.

#### **School maintenance funding**

**Jackson TAYLOR** (Bayswater) (13:33): I am also really proud to see the Allan Labor government committing some significant funds to upgrading our schools in terms of maintenance funding. I know the big stuff is great, but the small stuff is also really important. It was great to talk to principal Allyson Kocaj at Regency Park Primary School, where we have just announced \$800,000 for important maintenance work, which will go to some really important things, and \$300,000 to Boronia K–12 College. Speaking to Paul Broecker, he was absolutely stoked and excited. It is a fantastic school. Both schools are doing wonderful things, and I am proud that our government continues to back them in.

#### **Tormore Reserve pavilion**

**Jackson TAYLOR** (Bayswater) (13:34): Just lastly, construction is soon to start at the Tormore Reserve pavilion in Boronia, a great project fully funded by the Allan Labor government and the Albanese federal Labor government – getting on with it.

#### **Youth crime**

**Kim WELLS** (Rowville) (13:34): This statement condemns the Allan Labor government for its continued failure to deal with the youth crime crisis across Victoria. Every day Victorians wake up to yet another story or two of out-of-control youth offenders, particularly further examples of home invasions, aggravated burglaries, carjackings, stolen cars and chases across metropolitan Melbourne and regional cities. Victorians are sick and tired of the excuses and the platitudes being provided by the Premier, the Attorney-General and the Minister for Police. The shocking youth crime crisis Victorians are experiencing currently hits particularly close to home for one desperate family in my electorate of Rowville. The youngest child, who is in his early teens, of a local family headed by a mum and dad running their own very successful small businesses has created a never-ending nightmare over the past two years for his family and his community.

Many people are quick to jump to conclusions and criticise parents of young offenders. However, I can tell you through my liaison with the mother of the young offender in this case I have just mentioned that the mother and the family could not have done more to help this young offender. The long list of offences, which now adds up to hundreds of offences, for this one young offender involves home invasions, aggravated car thefts and, most recently, the ramming of police vehicles, which could have easily resulted in serious injury.

#### **Lunar New Year**

**Nathan LAMBERT** (Preston) (13:35): I would like to begin by thanking everyone involved in the expanded Lunar New Year celebrations that took place in central Preston a couple of weeks ago, including Adrian Hem, Peter Louey, Duncan Tang, Jacky Cheung and Jim Shen from the Victorian Chinese Memorial Foundation; Stavros Zikou and the team at Preston Business Association; and

Anthony Lay and all the fantastic lion and dragon dancers from the Chinese Masonic Society lion dance team.

#### **Mark Tierney**

**Nathan LAMBERT** (Preston) (13:36): I would also like to recognise the contribution to our community of Mark Tierney, who will retire this year after seven years as principal of Sacred Heart Primary. Mark actually started his teaching career at Sacred Heart way back in 1988, and I know everyone there appreciates the role he has played over many years in creating such a warm and welcoming culture and in helping many students from many different cultural and faith backgrounds be the best they could be.

#### **Macedonian Community Festival**

**Nathan LAMBERT** (Preston) (13:36): I would also like to congratulate David Cvetkovski, Silvana Naumovski and all the Preston Lions team on their inaugural Macedonian community festival. The club obviously have a very rich and long history in our area going back to 1947, but they are already having a fantastic 2025 with the new festival and promotion to National Premier Leagues Victoria for the senior men's team. I saw a win to start the season, and of course there is the national second-tier competition to come.

#### **Victorian Mosque Open Day**

**Nathan LAMBERT** (Preston) (13:37): Finally, I would like to thank Jamal Mohammed, Ali Abou-Eid and everyone at Preston Mosque for putting on a great mosque open day and for all the work they do across both our Muslim community and our broader community.

#### **Australian Apartment Advocacy**

**Will FOWLES** (Ringwood) (13:37): I rise today to speak about my recent meeting with Samantha Reece from Australian Apartment Advocacy, AAA. AAA is a not-for-profit organisation dedicated to advocating for the 2.5 million Australians living in apartments. Samantha leads the apartment watchdog in its efforts to secure better outcomes for apartment owners and renters. During our meeting I discussed concerns raised by many of my constituents, who feel powerless when navigating strata title properties and understanding their rights as apartment residents. Too often they are burdened by complex contracts, intricate regulations, unresponsive owners corporations and a lack of access to specialist advice. But the issue goes beyond just information. It highlights the difficulties residents face when trying to address unfair practices within a system that fails to support them effectively.

I call on the Victorian government to ensure that apartment owner-occupiers are not left vulnerable, particularly to well-resourced developers who are gaming the system. All apartment residents deserve clear information, fair processes and better access to dispute resolution. I frequently hear troubling stories of residents burdened with tens of thousands of dollars in maintenance costs due to critical building defects such as water penetration and structural issues. These defects are often the result of poor building standards aided and abetted by complex and poorly managed integrity processes. The conflict of interest is clear. Building surveyors are paid by the developer, compromising the integrity of the process. I urge the government to step in and address these ongoing issues before more residents are left to bear the consequences.

#### **Uncle Alan Harris**

**Michaela SETTLE** (Eureka) (13:38): I rise today to acknowledge the recent passing of an incredibly important man in my community, Noongar man Uncle Alan Harris, or 'Big Al', as he was often called. He was a much-loved and respected elder in many communities across Australia but particularly in my community of Ballarat.

Uncle Al was a stolen generations survivor. He achieved great success through his innate strength and courage and, after reconnecting with his elders, never forgetting their lessons. He used the power of

education and conversation to share his knowledge of First Nations culture with others. Always generous with his time, he was a talented musician and singer, often seen busking on the streets of Ballarat with his sons. It surprised many to know that when he was not doing this he was travelling the world sharing knowledge of Aboriginal culture through dance and music. He was a cultural educator in schools, teaching children from the west coast to the east, his brilliant storytelling engaging every listener.

He was a powerful advocate for improving the lives of First Australians and a great contributor to the discourse on these matters. His death is a significant loss for the community of Ballarat, his family and all who knew him.

### **KooyongKoot Alliance**

**John PESUTTO** (Hawthorn) (13:40): I rise today to recognise the outstanding work of the KooyongKoot Alliance and its dedicated volunteers, who continue to make an extraordinary contribution to environmental restoration and community engagement in the Gardiners Creek catchment, much of which traverses my electorate. In the past year alone the alliance and its affiliated friends groups have contributed an astounding 17,000 volunteer hours towards the health of our local environment. Through their leadership new friends groups have been established, including Friends of Gardiners Creek Reserve and Friends of Wurundjeri Walk, expanding community stewardship across the catchment. The alliance's impact extends beyond ecological restoration; it fosters community connection, bringing together people from all backgrounds to protect and enhance their local environment.

From university students passionate about taking tangible action to improve the environment to people who later in life are keen to get involved with their community, the alliance has become a valued institution throughout the eastern suburbs. The alliance was duly recognised with the 2024 Victorian Environmental Friends Network's Habitat Connections Award, highlighting its vital role in both environmental and community-building efforts.

I wish the KooyongKoot Alliance continued success as they continue to provide enormous value to our community. It is currently seeking ongoing funding of \$130,000 per year from various stakeholders, and I will be following and supporting this with interest.

### **Melton electorate fuel prices**

**Steve McGHIE** (Melton) (13:41): There is something seriously wrong with petrol prices in Melton, and I am absolutely furious that local fuel stations continue to get away with this blatant price gouging. This marks the fourth time I have spoken on this issue, yet nothing has changed. Meltonites are being exploited and every single fuel company operating here – the 7-Eleven, the BP, the Shell, the Ampol – should be ashamed. They are shamelessly robbing the people of Melton, charging more than 40 cents per litre above the rest of the state. Enough is enough. I have repeatedly approached the ACCC demanding an investigation into this outright rort. How much longer must Melton residents suffer under these outrageous fuel prices? The people of Melton are fed up. They refuse to be taken advantage of.

The price gouging in Melton is undeniable. To expose just how blatant it is, I tasked an intern with producing an investigative report, and the findings confirmed exactly what Melton residents have been shouting for years. Fuel prices in Melton are consistently 40 cents higher than the state average, and on any given day we are paying more than every other neighbouring suburb. Last week Melton drivers paid \$2.09 per litre, while Bacchus Marsh and Laverton paid \$1.67 and \$1.65. It is just blatant highway robbery. The report calls for a 'fuel watch' system, and while the Allan government's version is welcome and will help the Melton community know in advance the price of fuel in their local area, fuel providers in Melton are still extorting this community with unjustified prices. This rort must end, and I encourage the Melton people not to buy fuel in Melton.

### **Mahant Swami Maharaj**

**Belinda WILSON** (Narre Warren North) (13:43): It was my absolute honour to join the BAPS community in welcoming His Holiness Mahant Swami Maharaj, their 90-plus spiritual leader, to an amazing event at the Cranbourne Racecourse. This was such a wonderful evening spent alongside my colleagues the member for Cranbourne, the member for Southern Metro Mr Tarlamis in the other place and the member for Northern Metro Sheena Watt, as well as the Parliamentary Secretary for Multicultural Affairs the member for Greenvale, who made a very moving speech to over 3500 people.

The event attracted people not only from all over Victoria but from all over the world, and the evening was actually broadcast to millions of people. The event offered an opportunity for reflection and to appreciate the valuable contribution that the BAPS community make to all of our communities. I was grateful to have been part of this meaningful gathering, which brought people together in a spiritual unity full of respect, and I felt really blessed to be standing with my friends from the BAPS community who were all so excited and touched to be with their guru, some seeing him for the first time. It was really, really lovely.

### **Southern Cross Primary School**

**Belinda WILSON** (Narre Warren North) (13:44): I also had the pleasure of attending Southern Cross Primary School's breakfast club. An initiative by the Allan Labor government, this program ensures that students have access to a nutritious breakfast, setting them up for a productive learning day. A huge thanks to principal Helen and the team for having me.

### **Community safety**

**Bronwyn HALFPENNY** (Thomastown) (13:44): Today I stand here deeply disturbed as I speak up against an appalling assault on two fellow Victorians at the Pacific Epping shopping centre in the electorate I represent. There were two separate attacks within minutes on two women, who are now frightened, hurt and no longer feel safe in their homes or homeland. Their attacker is unknown to them. There was no interaction or forewarning leading to the assaults, but both women were wearing hijabs, and this is what the perpetrator targeted, including trying to tighten the scarf around one of the women's necks. While we are still waiting for the full details of the Victoria Police investigation, what we do know is this: those women, simply by going about their daily lives, were subjected to fear and violence simply for being who they are. No-one should ever feel that their safety is at risk because of their faith, their identity or their background.

Earlier today I had the privilege of meeting with representatives from the Board of Imams here in Parliament, and we spoke about this horrific incident. I assured them, as I do here today, of our government's unwavering commitment to creating a safer Victoria for all. There is no place for Islamophobia, and we must all work to stop it. We understand the pain caused by such attacks runs deep, and we will work closely with communities to address these issues with the urgency and sensitivity they deserve. Racism and Islamophobia have no place in our society. We need the full force of the law to stamp them out. I want to thank those very strong, brave, courageous women for calling this out, and I want to tell them here that they are not alone.

### **Pakenham community hospital**

**Emma VULIN** (Pakenham) (13:46): Last week I was very pleased to welcome Minister Horne to Pakenham. We went to visit the brand new site of the Pakenham community hospital. Work is carrying along, with the old Woolworths store now fully demolished and the new groundworks well underway. This was the first time that I had seen the design, and the renders look really fabulous inside and out. The Pakenham community hospital will have two levels of clinical spaces providing much-needed services, including allied health and rehab, pathology and imaging, public dental, chemotherapy, dialysis and urgent care. This is something that our community has needed for a long time, and I know that we are all very excited to see this finally starting to progress.

### **Beaconhills College**

**Emma VULIN** (Pakenham) (13:47): I also had the pleasure of visiting Beaconhills College, Pakenham campus. I and the Cardinia shire mayor Cr Jack Kowarzik went to speak to all the grade 4s about democracy. We spoke about the three levels of government and how amazing it is that people can influence change no matter their age. They had some terrific conversations.

### **Motor neurone disease**

**Emma VULIN** (Pakenham) (13:47): I also attended MND Victoria's Great MND Relay. We had 1300 people complete over 27,000 laps. That is more than 10,000 kilometres. They raised over \$378,000, so a whopping event on all levels and a great day.

### **Country Fire Authority Keysborough brigade**

**Tim RICHARDSON** (Mordialloc) (13:48): It is great to rise and acknowledge the outstanding work of Keysborough CFA, who were able to meet just recently with the Minister for Emergency Services, who hits the ground running and is an outstanding representative of the government. To see the time that was spent there, the support that was provided and recognition of the significant work that they have done over this fire season was outstanding. Keysborough CFA is one of the most diverse and inclusive brigades that we have in Victoria. There was farmland donated decades ago by the Brewer family when Keysborough South was not even thought of or conceived. It was farmland and paddocks, but it has become an absolutely amazing suburban/metropolitan community with so much on the go.

It was this Allan Labor government that committed \$500,000 towards planning money to upgrade facilities there, because we want to make sure that the first-class dedication of our emergency services volunteers is matched with the first-class facilities that are so important to the work and service that they do each and every day. Stewart Matulis, who is an absolute superstar captain out at Keysborough, and the Keysborough CFA family do an extraordinary job. Their service delivery standards are outstanding, and we hear about their ambitions and their connection with community – we see that at the Keysborough market, we see that at schools and kinders that they visit. Every single time there is a fire or an emergency situation that they are deployed to, they are there in a heartbeat. We give them a big shout-out – lots of love for Keysborough CFA and their future ambitions.

### **Bills**

#### **Justice Legislation Amendment (Anti-vilification and Social Cohesion) Bill 2024**

#### *Second reading*

#### **Debate resumed on motion of Anthony Carbines:**

That this bill be now read a second time.

#### **And Michael O'Brien's amendment:**

That all the words after 'That' be omitted and replaced with the words 'this house refuses to read this bill a second time until the Allan Labor government:

- (a) urgently considers additional options, including those available to Victoria Police, as a practical means of tackling antisocial and vilifying behaviours; and
- (b) consults further with Victoria's faith groups, including the Jewish and Islamic communities, who have warned the government that the proposed 'genuine political purpose' defence to incitement will damage social cohesion in this state.'

#### **And Will Fowles's amendment to Michael O'Brien's amendment:**

That all the words after 'until' be omitted and replaced with the words 'the government conducts community consultation on the 'genuine political purpose' defence.'

**Danny O'BRIEN** (Gippsland South) (13:49): I am pleased to rise to speak on the Justice Legislation Amendment (Anti-vilification and Social Cohesion) Bill 2024. I commend the government for attempting to do some things that will reduce vilification in our community, but I think the government has found that legislating to address these issues is harder than it looks. As with all, I would think, right-thinking people in this place, I have been appalled at the rise in particularly antisemitic behaviour over the past couple of years, particularly since the 7 October attacks in Israel. It is not our country, it is not our state. It has been absolutely appalling that we have seen that increase in people targeting Jewish people, targeting those with strong views supporting the Israeli state, and it is very often, in my humble opinion, racism dressed up as concern for the people of Palestine.

I would have thought that perhaps the members of the Greens might have realised that their campaigning on Gaza over the past couple of years has been counterproductive, after the Prahran by-election where their vote did not move despite the fact there was no Labor candidate at all, indicating that people have started to see them as the extremists that they are, yet we still had the member for Richmond standing up today raising this issue again. I must say, as an aside, if I spent as much time on issues that are not relevant to my electorate but are relevant to somewhere overseas as the Greens do, I reckon I would lose my seat pretty quickly. It astounds me that the Greens spend so much time advocating on issues in the Middle East – a long, long way away from Richmond or Brunswick or Melbourne – and so far have got away with it. But as I said, I think they should perhaps wake up to the fact that what has happened in Prahran is a suggestion that perhaps they should be focused on what is happening in their electorates, not what is happening on the other side of the world.

It is not to say that we cannot and we do not all have views about what is happening over there, but as local members of the Victorian Parliament our ability to impact what is happening in the Middle East is pretty minimal. And I say that to the councils who think that they can pass resolutions for a ceasefire or for peace in the Middle East and somehow Hamas and Benjamin Netanyahu are going to pay attention to what is happening at local councils in Victoria. The notion is absurd, and I think again it highlights that much of this is antisemitic opinion dressed up as concern for others.

As I said, I acknowledge the government's attempt to try and stamp out some of this vilifying behaviour, whether it is for Jewish people or whether it is for Islamic people. The member for Thomastown just raised a terrible case of two Muslim women being attacked in the street. This is not something that we should be tolerating for anyone, and I absolutely condemn any of those attacks, particularly those on the Jewish community over the last 18 months or so. But as the member for Malvern has indicated, we on this side do not think that the government has got this legislation right. They have no doubt come to it with noble intentions, but I think they have seriously misjudged the legislation as it is.

In particular there are a couple of aspects of the legislation that we have concerns about. One is the introduction of a 'genuine political purpose' defence to the incitement offence – that is to say that someone can incite conduct against a person with a particular protected attribute, whether that is their race, their religion, their sexual orientation or the other protected attributes – if I can quickly find them – gender identity, disability, sex characteristics, sexual orientation and personal association. We do not have any issue with those being introduced to this realm, but the political defence – 'genuine political purpose' – we think actually counterintuitively gives a green light to some of this behaviour.

As the member for Malvern has indicated, in particular when it comes to antisemitic conduct, it would seem to us that those who wish to attack Jews will simply change their language to 'Israel' or to 'Zionists' and therefore say that this is genuinely protected political content. To that end we have seen a quote from the federal Attorney-General Mark Dreyfus, who said:

The label Zionist is used, not in any way, accurately. When critics use that word, they actually mean Jew. They're not really saying Zionist, they're saying Jew because they know that they cannot say Jew, so they say Zionist or words [such as] Zeo or Zio.

I think that highlights what our concern about this legislation is – that if the genuine political defence is actually introduced, it will be a green light for people to continue to vilify Jews and indeed potentially others; there are many other examples that could be used. That is one of the concerns that we have about this legislation.

There are a number of others indeed on the ‘genuine political purpose’ aspect of this legislation. I understand, or we have been hearing, that perhaps the government may move to amend this bill. As the first speaker since this bill was debated last sitting week, we are yet to hear whether the government is actually going to do that. I think that would be a good thing. However, it does not necessarily address our concerns with the broader bill. They go to other matters with regard to the anti-vilification protections. One of those is that currently criminal offence has an obligation to prove that a person’s actions both incited hatred and threatened physical harm or property damage, and under this bill that would change to either of those, not necessarily both, and particularly it introduces the word ‘likely’, so if someone’s actions or words are likely to incite hatred et cetera rather than actually doing so, and I think that is certainly a lower threshold.

The other aspect that is of concern to us goes to the question of what becomes a highly subjective element, and that is to actually change the test of what vilification is. It is usually – and we see this term in law a lot – what a reasonable person would think. In this case we are talking about what a reasonable person would find to be hateful or would incite hatred against that person. The test in this case under the bill would be what a reasonable person with the protected attribute would be reasonably likely to find hateful. That is a concern because that makes it a far more narrow test as to what might be considered vilification. What might be considered vilification by you, Deputy Speaker, or me or someone else on the street is very different to someone in perhaps a minority group, perhaps in a very minor sect of a religion, so it is not necessarily what a reasonable person finds. It is not what a reasonable person who is a Muslim might find. It may well be that the person with the protected attribute is a Shia Muslim or a Sunni Muslim or a Greek Orthodox Christian, as opposed to just a Christian.

The point I make is that these are very, very narrow definitions, and it therefore opens the prospect that people may take offence and feel vilified and the person saying those things would have no idea what is offensive to a particular group. We have seen that with the *Charlie Hebdo* attacks in France and many others over the years that are a concern. I do strongly condemn any vilification particularly on race or religion and it needs to be stamped out, but I do not think the government has got this particular legislation right. The ‘political purpose’ defence, that ‘likely to incite’ and that lower threshold of reasonables are issues that need to be addressed, and that is why I support the member for Malvern’s reasoned amendment.

**Business interrupted under sessional orders.**

*Questions without notice and ministers statements*

**Minister for Police**

**Brad BATTIN** (Berwick – Leader of the Opposition) (14:01): My question is to the Premier. Does the Premier have confidence in the Minister for Police?

**Jacinta ALLAN** (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:01): The answer is yes. In the time available to me to expand on that answer, lest the Manager of Opposition Business get a bit distracted by the answer, the answer is yes because the police minister is working incredibly hard to back in the hard work of the men and women of Victoria Police. We value the work of Victoria Police. We not only value the work of Victoria Police but we back that in every single day. We back that in with additional resources – \$4.6 billion in additional resources to Victoria Police, which has resulted in there being 21,950 police officers on our streets.

**David Southwick:** On a point of order, Speaker, on relevance, the question was not about the hardworking efforts of Victoria Police. The question was about the work ethic of the police minister. I ask you to bring the Premier back to the question about the work, or lack of, from the police minister.

**The SPEAKER:** Order! The member for Caulfield will resume his seat. There is no point of order. The Premier answered the question at the outset, and she has 2 minutes left to answer.

**Jacinta ALLAN:** As I was saying, because of the work that we do as a government, led by the Minister for Police in working with Victoria Police, we have more police here in Victoria compared to any other jurisdiction in the country. But it goes further than that. It also goes to backing Victoria Police with the resources and the equipment that they need, and that comes from working with Victoria Police. It goes further than that as well. It goes to working incredibly hard, as the Minister for Police has been doing, and bringing to this place legislation to give police additional powers. Whether it is to strengthen the powers for Victoria Police on being able to search for dangerous knives – we know there is no reason for anyone in this state to carry machetes and knives, which we know are deadly. The member for Melton knows this from the huge amount of work he has done in his community. We are strengthening those powers, doing the work to crack down on criminal organisations and the work to make sure that there is legislative reform that includes, can I say, giving police additional powers to crack down on hate.

I will not anticipate what is on the notice paper, but that is what comes from working with and listening to the men and women of Victoria Police, listening to the community. We know we need to do more, and that is what the police minister is working incredibly hard on as well. The answer to the Leader of the Opposition's question is yes, and that yes comes with a very strong understanding that the way you support the men and women of Victoria Police is not by cutting funding, as those opposite did, not by interfering with the office, but by backing the men and women of Victoria Police.

**Bridget Vallence:** On a point of order, Speaker, imputations on members on this side generally are disorderly.

**The SPEAKER:** Order! There is no point of order.

**Brad BATTIN** (Berwick – Leader of the Opposition) (14:06): Does the Premier have the same level of confidence that the Minister for Police had in the former chief commissioner just days before sacking him?

**Jacinta ALLAN** (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:06): In answering the supplementary question from the Leader of the Opposition I draw the Leader of the Opposition to the answer I gave to the substantive question. I do not think I could have been clearer for the benefit of the opposition, and so I will go through it again: absolutely I support the work that the police minister is doing engaging with police and, most importantly, backing the men and women of Victoria Police. We value the work of Victoria Police, and the way we demonstrate that we value the work of the Victorian police is by, through the work of the police minister –

*Members interjecting.*

**The SPEAKER:** Leader of the House! Leader of the Opposition!

**Jacinta ALLAN:** backing them with the tools and the resources and the powers that they need to continue to keep our community safe.

**The SPEAKER:** I remind members at the table to cease interjecting across the table while the Premier is on her feet, or indeed while any member is on their feet.

**Bridget Vallence:** On a point of order, Speaker, on relevance, the question was very narrow about the sacking of the former chief commissioner by the Minister for Police. Could you ask the Premier to come back to that very narrow question?



**The SPEAKER:** Order! The Premier was being relevant to the question. The Premier has concluded her answer.

**Ministers statements: public transport fares**

**Gabrielle WILLIAMS** (Dandenong – Minister for Transport Infrastructure, Minister for Public and Active Transport) (14:08): I rise to update the house on the Allan Labor government’s regional fare cap and how it continues to make it cheaper for Victorians to explore our beautiful state. Since we capped regional public transport fares back in 2023, Victorians have collectively saved \$107 million on train and coach travel around our state. That is money back in the pockets of Victorians each and every day, because unlike those opposite, who criticised the regional fare cap and who forgot to order a single V/Line carriage for years – and that is before we get to the closure of train lines – we are committed on this side of the house to making public transport more –

**Bridget Vallence:** On a point of order, Speaker, attacking the opposition in a ministers statement, as ruled on by former Speaker Brooks, is disorderly.

**Mary-Anne Thomas:** On the point of order, Speaker, there is no point of order. Everyone knows it is entirely appropriate to contrast what this government is doing for the people of regional Victoria in delivering transport infrastructure with what those on the other side did when they were in government.

**The SPEAKER:** Order! I remind the minister not to attack the opposition. It is okay to contrast, but I ask you to be mindful of your answer.

**Gabrielle WILLIAMS:** On this side of the house we are committed to making public transport more accessible and more affordable for all Victorians, whether it be to get people to medical appointments or to visit their family and friends or whether –

**Bridget Vallence:** On a point of order, Speaker, I believe the minister is reading from notes.

**The SPEAKER:** Minister, were you reading from notes?

**Gabrielle WILLIAMS:** Only referring to notes, Speaker.

**The SPEAKER:** The minister was referring to notes.

**Gabrielle WILLIAMS:** But I am happy to provide the member with a list of what her government and her predecessors have done in the public transport system.

Or whether it is to get students to the great universities and TAFEs across our state, where thousands of Victorians will be heading next week to indulge in orientation week celebrations and kick off their studies for the year. Students across the state will be very carefully budgeting this week and mapping out their journeys to campus, and thanks to this government’s fairer fares policies, an undergrad student from Melbourne who is starting their dream course at Fed Uni in Ballarat can get to O week and back for as little as \$5.50. Similarly, a student from Ballarat who might have chosen to enrol at Melbourne Uni will soon have their very own direct train connection when our new Parkville Metro Tunnel station opens later this year – and I note those opposite blocked that too. These are trips that would have otherwise cost students \$22.80 – *(Time expired)*

**Victoria Police**

**David SOUTHWICK** (Caulfield) (14:11): My question is to the Minister for Police. Was the government’s direction to Victoria Police to find over \$1 billion in cuts in its budget one of the minister’s policies from his bottom drawer –

*Members interjecting.*

**The SPEAKER:** The member for Eureka can leave the chamber for an hour.

**Member for Eureka withdrew from chamber.**

**David SOUTHWICK:** My question is to the Minister for Police. Was the government's direction to Victoria Police to find over \$1 billion in cuts in its budget one of the minister's policies from his bottom drawer or just a consequence of Labor's mismanaged budget?

**Anthony CARBINES** (Ivanhoe – Minister for Police, Minister for Community Safety, Minister for Victims, Minister for Racing) (14:13): I thank the adjunct professor, the member for Caulfield, for his question.

**The SPEAKER:** Refer to members by their correct titles, Minister. I have already addressed that.

**Anthony CARBINES:** I thank the member for Caulfield for his question. \$4.5 billion in additional investment – that is what our government have provided to Victoria Police since we came to office. I totally reject the premise of the question from the member for Caulfield. Amongst that funding is a billion dollars for capital works for Victoria Police since we came to office. That includes the new Benalla station, which is soon to open, and the recent announcement of work at Point Cook.

**Bridget Vallence:** On a point of order, Speaker, on relevance, it was a very narrow question. Was the \$1 billion of cuts from the minister's bottom drawer? I ask you to get him to come back to answering that very narrow question.

**The SPEAKER:** I remind the Manager of Opposition Business that points of order are not an opportunity to repeat the question. I would ask the Leader of the House to be succinct on the point of order.

**Mary-Anne Thomas:** Speaker, there is no point of order. If the Manager of Opposition Business had been listening, she would have noted that the Minister for Police rejected the premise of the question, and I ask that you allow him to continue.

**The SPEAKER:** I do not uphold the point of order.

**Anthony CARBINES:** Again, in rejecting the premise of the question, a false assertion from the member for Caulfield, there has been \$1 billion in capital works from our government to Victoria Police since we came to office. The Clyde North police station is very popular with the member for Cranbourne and the member for Bass. We have also got the Narre Warren police station work that is underway. Point Cook, South Melbourne –

**David Southwick:** On a point of order, Speaker, on relevance, this is not about what the government has done in the past but what the government intends to do in the future with a billion dollars of cuts. I ask you to bring the minister back to the question.

**The SPEAKER:** The minister rejected the premise of the question.

**Anthony CARBINES:** The only cuts and closures that we have seen to Victoria Police were when they were in office before – the cuts and closures party, the Liberal–National parties. There was \$100 million in cuts and not one additional police officer funded in your time in office.

**Bridget Vallence:** On a point of order, Speaker, reflections and imputations on members on this side of the house in relation to cuts are disorderly. They are completely baseless.

**The SPEAKER:** The minister did not reflect on any member of the opposition.

**Anthony CARBINES:** Victoria Police could only deliver 70,000 arrests in the year to September, a record number of arrests, with the record funding they have had from the Allan Labor government of \$4.5 billion since we came to office: 3600 additional funded police officer positions under our government; a billion dollars in capital works funded by our government; Taskforce VIPER to disrupt and dismantle organised crime in our state; the work that we are doing to crack down on antisemitism,

Islamophobia and racial intolerance in our community – we have seen that through Operation Park; Taskforce Lunar – I could go on.

**Bridget Vallence:** On a point of order, Speaker, the minister is seeking to introduce extraneous matters to the question. The question was about cuts to the budget and whether they are from his bottom drawer.

**Mary-Anne Thomas:** Speaker, there is no point of order. The Manager of Opposition Business is jumping up here with no basis for the points of order that she is making. They are frivolous and a waste of time. The minister rejected the premise of the question and is able to answer the question in a way in which he sees fit.

**The SPEAKER:** I cannot compel the minister how to answer the question. I ask the minister to be relevant, though, to the question.

**Anthony CARBINES:** In rejecting the premise of the question and outlining the additional record funding from the Allan Labor government, it is also important to then describe how that funding is being used by Victoria Police. Victoria Police, through Operation Trinity, through Operation Alliance, can only dedicate these additional resources of Victoria Police on the ground if they have got the resources funded by the Allan Labor government – and they have them. It is for Victoria Police to determine where those operational resources are put. That is why we have seen some 70,000 arrests in the year to September. This is the work Victoria Police members do every day – a 24/7 emergency response.

**Bridget Vallence:** On a point of order, Speaker, your own ruling in *Rulings from the Chair*, page 74, is:

Members do not have unfettered ability to raise matters extraneous to the debate at hand.

This is about cutting the current operational budget for Victoria Police and whether it is from the minister's bottom drawer. I ask you to ask the minister to come back to that very narrow question.

**The SPEAKER:** The minister rejected the premise of the question at the outset. I do remind the minister that extraneous debate around the question is not allowed and ask that he come back to the relevancy of the question.

**Anthony CARBINES:** When you have record funding in Victoria Police from the Allan Labor government, there is a lot to say, there is a lot to contribute, and I can thank on behalf of everyone in this house Victoria Police members for the work they do to keep our communities safe, day and night – the 24/7 emergency response that is available to all Victorians thanks to the hard work of Victoria Police and the record funding of the Allan Labor government.

**David SOUTHWICK (Caulfield) (14:19):** I note the minister did not thank Shane Patton.

**The SPEAKER:** Order! Member for Caulfield!

**David SOUTHWICK:** Minister, how will cutting over \$1 billion from Victoria's police budget make Victorians safer?

**Anthony CARBINES (Ivanhoe – Minister for Police, Minister for Community Safety, Minister for Victims, Minister for Racing) (14:20):** Totally wrong; I reject the premise of the question and the supplementary question from the member for Caulfield. Let us again be very clear when he raises matters about the Victoria Police budget, an annual budget of over \$4 billion a year – but since our government came to office there has been \$4.5 billion in additional funding, including \$1 billion in capital works investment alone. And we are seeing the activity. We are seeing the benefits of that capital works funding not only through the member for Albert Park in South Melbourne and the members for Bass and Cranbourne in Clyde North; there is the work that we are seeing across the Narres, in Narre Warren South and Narre Warren North, the work that is happening there. And I cannot wait to get to Benalla with the Treasurer in the other place.

**David Southwick:** On a point of order, Speaker, again on relevance, the minister is attempting to provide a history lesson on what has happened in the past, not what is happening in the future in terms of a billion-dollar cut in the budget and Victorians being less safe.

**The SPEAKER:** Order! Member for Caulfield! There is no point of order.

**Anthony CARBINES:** We can only look to those opposite for cuts and closures and a funding cut to the police budget. Those who did not fund one additional police officer are those opposite, and they stand condemned.

**Bridget Vallence:** On a point of order, Speaker, question time is not an opportunity to attack the opposition.

**The SPEAKER:** The minister to come back to answering the question, not attacking the opposition. The minister has concluded his answer.

#### Ministers statements: fuel prices

**Nick STAIKOS** (Bentleigh – Minister for Consumer Affairs, Minister for Local Government) (14:22): We all know the frustration of passing the servo in the morning seeing one price, only for it to have skyrocketed by the time you fill up in the afternoon. Right now, filling up the tank is less of a transaction and more of a lucky dip, except the only surprise is paying more than you expected and the only winner is a multinational corporation. But our government is doing something about it. The Allan Labor government's fair fuel plan is going to give Victorians certainty –

**Bridget Vallence:** On a point of order, Speaker, I know the minister is new in his role, but I think he is reading from notes.

**The SPEAKER:** Order! Is the minister reading from his notes?

**A member** interjected.

**The SPEAKER:** The minister is referring to notes.

**Nick STAIKOS:** The Allan Labor government's fair fuel plan is going to give Victorians certainty over the cost of fuel. Prices will be publicly reported the day before and then locked in for 24 hours. It is as simple as that. If you want to know the cost of fuel nearby, you will be able to check the Service Victoria app, where you will be able to view in real time the guaranteed price at more than 1500 fuel retailers across the state. Families will no longer need a crystal ball to guess how much they will pay.

But sadly, it is no surprise that those opposite take issue with these reforms, reforms that are going to save families money at the bowser, because the Liberals will always put the interests of their buddies in big business ahead of the needs of ordinary Victorians. We know that that is true. Our focus is squarely –

**Bridget Vallence:** On a point of order, Speaker, *Rulings from the Chair*, page 161, from former Speaker Brooks, specifies that you cannot attack the opposition during a ministers statement.

**Mary-Anne Thomas:** Speaker, there is no point of order. The minister was merely pointing out what are the actual facts of the matter: that those on the other side are opposing this cost-of-living initiative that is being delivered by the very fine Minister for Consumer Affairs.

*Members interjecting.*

**James Newbury:** Further to the point of order, Speaker, it is entirely out of order to attack the opposition, especially from a bloke who drives around in a ministerial car.

*Members interjecting.*

**The SPEAKER:** Order! The Premier will come to order. Leader of the House! The member for Brighton knows full well how to raise a point of order: without extrapolation. The minister will cease attacking the opposition in his ministers statement.

**Nick STAIKOS:** Well, Bridget's job is safe. Our focus is squarely on helping with the cost of living and putting –

*Members interjecting.*

**The SPEAKER:** I have been pretty lenient with members today. There are still a few questions to go, so there will be no warnings.

**Bridget Vallence:** On a point of order, Speaker, ministers should use correct titles.

**The SPEAKER:** Minister, come back to answering the question, and I remind you to use correct titles.

**Nick STAIKOS:** Our focus is squarely on helping with the cost of living and putting money back into the pockets of ordinary Victorians. From free rego for apprentices to free kinder, capped V/Line fares and stamp duty exemptions, our fair fuel plan builds on the long history of cost-of-living relief.

#### **Bail laws**

**Brad BATTIN** (Berwick – Leader of the Opposition) (14:26): My question is to the Premier. In the past two years over a hundred properties have been firebombed in Victoria's tobacco wars. How many offenders have been charged for these firebombings and bailed back into the community?

**Jacinta ALLAN** (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:27): In answering the Leader of the Opposition's question, at the outset can I thank the work of Victoria Police, particularly the work they are doing via Taskforce Lunar, which demonstrates the point that the Minister for Police was making earlier in terms of the additional resources, tools and powers that have been provided to Victoria Police and have enabled them to establish this important taskforce. I can advise the house that as a result of the strong work from Victoria Police through Taskforce Lunar there have been over 200 search warrants executed and 80 offenders arrested.

In terms of the second part of the question –

**Brad Battin:** Speaker, my point of order is on relevance, and it comes back to asking how many were bailed back into the community. It was very specific.

**Mary-Anne Thomas:** Speaker, there is no point of order. The Premier was being entirely relevant to the question. She has only been on her feet for 50 seconds and she has addressed the first part of the question. As the Premier herself indicated before the Leader of the Opposition got up, she was on to the second point of the question.

**The SPEAKER:** Order! The Premier has only been on her feet a short time. I will give her a chance to answer the question.

**Jacinta ALLAN:** I am delighted to have the opportunity to answer both parts of the question from the Leader of the Opposition, because the Leader of the Opposition's question went to how many arrests and then went to the question –

**Brad Battin** interjected.

**The SPEAKER:** Order! Leader of the Opposition, if you want to raise a point of order, you stand. Do not yell across the –

*Members interjecting.*

**The SPEAKER:** Order! The member for Cranbourne can leave the chamber for an hour.

**Member for Cranbourne withdrew from chamber.**

**Mary-Anne Thomas** interjected.

**The SPEAKER:** Leader of the House, this is your last warning.

**Jacinta ALLAN:** I reiterate what I said earlier: the men and women of Victoria Police, through the work they are doing on Taskforce Lunar, have seen 200 search warrants executed and 80 offenders arrested and have seized up to \$37 million worth of illegal tobacco products. In terms of answering the second part of the question –

**Bridget Vallence:** On a point of order, Speaker, all answers to questions must be succinct. The Premier is repeating something and failing to get to the very narrow question of how many people have been charged for firebombings and then bailed. If you could you please ask the Premier –

**The SPEAKER:** Order! The Premier was being relevant. I cannot direct the Premier how to answer the question.

**Jacinta ALLAN:** In answer to the second part of the Leader of the Opposition’s question, data around bail and the number of people who have received bail through the independent judicial process governed by the courts is information I will seek from the courts.

**Brad BATTIN** (Berwick – Leader of the Opposition) (14:30): Katie Tangey, 27, died in a Truganina house fire in mid-January, an innocent victim of the tobacco wars. Premier, how many more Victorians will be killed or injured due to the government’s bail law failures?

**The SPEAKER:** I ask the Leader of the Opposition to rephrase the question.

*Members interjecting.*

**Jacinta Allan:** On a point of order, Speaker, I ask the Leader of the Opposition to withdraw that offensive allegation. The Leader of the Opposition has form in this place for making baseless allegations, and I ask him to withdraw.

**The SPEAKER:** I ask the Leader of the Opposition to withdraw.

**Brad BATTIN:** I withdraw.

**The SPEAKER:** And I ask you to rephrase the question.

**Bridget Vallence:** On a point of order, Speaker, I seek guidance in relation to the request to rephrase the question, because the link is clear: tobacco wars and bail. I am just seeking clarification on that.

**The SPEAKER:** The request to rephrase is because it is hypothetical, and I ask the Leader of the Opposition to rephrase.

**Brad BATTIN:** Katie Tangey, 27, died in a Truganina house fire in mid-January, an innocent victim of the tobacco wars. Premier, how many more Victorians will be killed or injured due to the government’s failure to act on laws here to protect Victorians when it comes to bail?

**Mary-Anne Thomas:** On a point of order, Speaker, could I ask that you ask the Leader of the Opposition to again consider rephrasing his question. Once again it is about the hypotheticals that he has raised. Once again in his question he has come in here speculating about causal links, and this is a matter before the courts. Speaker, I seek your guidance but ask that perhaps he rephrase again.

**The SPEAKER:** There are two parts to this standing order and *Rulings from the Chair*. One is a hypothetical question, and the second is asking for an opinion. Could the Leader of the Opposition ask his question so that he is not asking for an opinion and it is not a request for a hypothetical.

**Brad BATTIN:** Katie Tangey, 27, died in a Truganina house fire in mid-January, an innocent victim in the tobacco wars. Premier, what advice have you received in relation to your bail laws and the impact on the tobacco wars here in Victoria?

**Mary-Anne Thomas:** On a point of order, Speaker, the matters that the Leader of the Opposition has raised to the best of my knowledge are alleged, and this is a matter that is still under investigation by Victoria Police. The link that the Leader of the Opposition continues to draw is a speculative one that has not been endorsed by Victoria Police or indeed found to –

**Sam Groth:** On the point of order, Speaker, the Leader of the Opposition asked specifically what advice the Premier has received in relation to her policy. It reflects directly to policies of this government.

**The SPEAKER:** I will allow the question.

**Jacinta Allan:** On the point of order, Speaker, I am wondering if you can ask the Leader of the Opposition to assist. I am very willing to answer the question. Could he perhaps provide the evidence or detail on which he is basing the allegation about the tragic loss of life that we have seen. To my knowledge there has been no reference to issues of bail with this incident. I am hoping the Leader of the Opposition can provide some clarification on his question.

*Members interjecting.*

**The SPEAKER:** Order! It is not for me to determine the facts or otherwise of questions or answers. I will allow the question.

**Jacinta ALLAN** (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:35): At the outset, can I convey my deepest sympathy to the family who are grieving the loss of a young woman. My advice is that Victoria Police are investigating this arson attack and are undertaking investigations and pursuing a number of related lines of investigation. I will respect the work of the men and women of Victoria Police. I will not compromise their ability to do their work in pursuing the people who caused this loss of life. It would be deeply irresponsible to do so. Equally deeply irresponsible is to come into this place with baseless allegations that only cause distress to members of the community.

**Bridget Vallence:** On a point of order on relevance, Speaker, the question was very narrow about advice received on the failure to strengthen bail laws. I would ask you to ask the Premier to come back to that very narrow question.

**The SPEAKER:** The Premier has concluded her answer, and the Premier was being relevant to the question.

#### **Ministers statements: Get Active Kids voucher program**

**Ros SPENCE** (Kalkallo – Minister for Agriculture, Minister for Community Sport, Minister for Carers and Volunteers) (14:37): I am very pleased to update the house on the Allan Labor government's work to make community sport more accessible for Victorian families. Our very popular Get Active Kids voucher program provides eligible families with up to \$200 to cover the cost of uniforms, equipment and registration. When we introduced the program four years ago, we committed to delivering 100,000 vouchers to families. Thanks to continued investment by the Allan Labor government, including \$9 million in the 2024–25 budget, that number has now grown to more than 184,000 vouchers and still counting because we are currently in round 8 of the program.

I would like to share some key highlights. The vouchers have been most popular in the local government areas of Hume, Melton and Wyndham. In this round swimming has been the most popular activity, with more than 10,000 vouchers provided to families. To ensure that even more people can access affordable swimming lessons and learn those really essential water safety skills, we are continuing to invest in the VICSWIM Summer Kidz program. This is a really terrific program that provided safe and inclusive lessons throughout the January school holidays to more than 17,700 kids

at 175 venues. The most popular venues were Ocean Grove beach in the electorate of Bellarine, the Ivanhoe aquatic centre in the electorate of Ivanhoe and the Eltham Leisure Centre in the electorate of Eltham. I would really like to acknowledge our delivery partner Aquatics & Recreation Victoria for their work on the Summer Kidz program.

We all know that everyone deserves a chance to participate in the sport that they love. That is why the Allan Labor government remains committed to breaking down those barriers of cost and making community sport accessible to all.

### Population growth

**Darren CHEESEMAN** (South Barwon) (14:39): My question is to the Premier. Victoria's population is growing at a faster rate than at any point in the last 25 years. Many thousands of these new Victorians are moving to Victoria's growth corridors located in outer suburban Melbourne and in regional Victoria. Is government investment keeping up with this massive population growth?

**Bridget Vallence:** On a point of order, Speaker, I believe the question is seeking a hypothetical.

**The SPEAKER:** I do not believe that is the case.

**Will Fowles:** Speaker, I just want to respond to the point of order. The point of order was suggesting that there was a hypothetical in the question. I will spring to the defence of my crossbench colleague here. The question asked about government investment. That is not hypothetical investment; that is investment, investment made, and I think that the question is entirely within order.

**The SPEAKER:** There is no point of order.

**Jacinta ALLAN:** In thanking the member for South Barwon, I do acknowledge that the member for South Barwon, like many members in this place, represents some of the fastest growing communities in the state. Indeed members who represent the municipalities of Wyndham and Melton represent some of the fastest growing municipalities in the country, which is why we do acknowledge that one of the important tasks of government is to support working people and families to have choices around where they can live, which is why building more homes in these communities is just so important. It is why we have outlined our plan to build more homes right across the state, but understanding too that as we build more homes, there is a need to keep pace with the infrastructure that makes these places not just great places to have a home but to be part of a local community as well.

In addition to all the work that we have done to build schools, to invest in hospitals and to invest in road and rail connections, of course we understand that there is more to do, which is why a really important feature of the work we are doing when it comes to building more homes is making sure that there is an infrastructure contribution regime that supports a fair distribution of the infrastructure that is invested in in those communities. At the moment the system is not fair. There is a hotchpotch; there are a range of different arrangements across the state as to how we partner with the developers and the industry to see infrastructure and community assets invested in at the same time as we build more communities. It is why, as part of the work we are doing to build more homes – to build more homes close to train stations, to build more townhouses and apartments – our 10-year release of greenfield land is all part of our overall efforts to build more homes right across the state. Whether you are in Brighton or South Barwon, we want to make sure that we are also investing in the infrastructure that keeps up with that.

That is why, alongside the work we are doing building more homes – and I am sure the education minister could tell me how many schools we have built; the health minister could tell me how many hospitals we have built – we also understand that we need to address some of those structural challenges, unlocking the planning system to make sure that there is a regime that gets homes built more quickly and that there is an infrastructure contribution regime that also supports the development of community assets as well. This is part of the work that we know we have to keep doing: building



and investing in schools and hospitals and road and rail and community sporting infrastructure and having the structures around that to continue to support investments right across the state.

**Darren CHEESEMAN** (South Barwon) (14:43): Can the federal government do more to support local governments and your investments in delivering for these growth corridors?

**Bridget Vallence**: On a point of order, Speaker, *Rulings from the Chair*, page 156, from former Speaker Madigan, states that hypotheticals regarding future federal governments are out of order.

**The SPEAKER**: I believe the member for South Barwon was referring to the current federal government. I will allow the question.

**Jacinta ALLAN** (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:44): I am sure it will come as no surprise to any federal government that a state premier is going to answer that question with a yes. Of course we will always look at opportunities to partner with Canberra, particularly following a decade of time when Victoria was not getting its fair share, when Peter Dutton was sitting at the cabinet table. What we have seen in the last couple of years is a partner in Canberra, where we have secured funding for schools, we have secured funding for important housing projects and we have secured funding for the Suburban Rail Loop as part of an infrastructure pipeline that includes the Suburban Rail Loop, the North East Link and the airport project – projects that support jobs as well as the infrastructure our communities need. I will continue to advocate on behalf of this state to get our fair share of infrastructure funding, because that is about supporting working people and families here in Victoria.

#### Ministers statements: health services

**Mary-Anne THOMAS** (Macedon – Leader of the House, Minister for Health, Minister for Ambulance Services) (14:45): I rise to update the house on the Allan Labor government's work to ensure that all Victorians can access free health care where and when they need it. Our government has invested in 29 urgent care clinics right across the state. We are investing in these so that families can access the care that they need when and where they need it. We know that there have been more than 719,000 presentations at these urgent care clinics, and what is more, we know that 50 per cent of those are patients who would otherwise have gone to an emergency department. Free, fast and local – that is what we are on about through the delivery of our urgent care centres.

But we have not just stopped there. Our nation-leading Victorian Virtual Emergency Department has been an absolute ripper, now operating 24/7, proudly built in the north out of Northern Hospital. This statewide service is available for urgent but not life-threatening emergencies. It has seen well over 400,000 patients since its inception, and 85 per cent of those patients tell us that they otherwise would have gone to the emergency department. Of course in order to deliver this, you have got to keep backing in your hardworking healthcare workers, so I am delighted that we now have a new enterprise agreement with our ambos. We have a new enterprise agreement with our nurses, and today I was able to introduce legislation to strengthen nurse-to-patient ratios.

It is no secret that Medicare is broken. Let me tell you why it is broken. It is broken because of almost 10 years of neglect from a federal Liberal–National government. I have been talking about the action that we are taking. On that side of the house what have they done to advocate for Medicare? Absolutely nothing.

#### Shrine of Remembrance

**Tim BULL** (Gippsland East) (14:47): My question is to the Minister for Police. The last post commemorative service held every Sunday at the Shrine of Remembrance is under threat due to police budget cuts, a service that has been held since 1935. Why has the government allowed the last post service to be under threat?

**Anthony CARBINES** (Ivanhoe – Minister for Police, Minister for Community Safety, Minister for Victims, Minister for Racing) (14:48): The last post services at the shrine will continue. Any claim

otherwise from the member opposite is false. Can I also add, just for completeness, that I am a member of the friends of the shrine, member 13, and I congratulate the Shrine of Remembrance for the iconic and amazing services and work they provide to remind all Victorians of the sacrifices that have been made in the past by those who served our country.

**Tim BULL** (Gippsland East) (14:49): Minister, you have said in this chamber several times that the police force is well funded. If so, why did it write to the shrine saying it cannot afford to have PSOs continuing to attend this service?

**Anthony CARBINES** (Ivanhoe – Minister for Police, Minister for Community Safety, Minister for Victims, Minister for Racing) (14:49): I refer the member to my previous answer. The services at the shrine in relation to those matters will continue.

**Tim Bull:** My point of order is on relevance, Speaker. The question related to why VicPol wrote to the shrine saying it cannot afford to send PSOs to that service.

**The SPEAKER:** The minister has concluded his answer.

**Ministers statements: TAFE funding**

[NAMES AWAITING VERIFICATION]

**Jacinta ALLAN** (Bendigo East – Premier) (14:50): Last week I met Elena at Kangan’s brand new Broadmeadows station in the electorate of our hardworking member for Broadmeadows. Elena told the member for Broadmeadows and me that for as long as she could remember she had dreamed of being an early childhood educator. She believes that kids are our future, and as a mum she knows there is nothing more important than giving those kids the best start in life. Over the years, though, for Elena life got in the way. She had four kids of her own, and she never got the chance to pursue her dream until today. She is now realising that ambition, studying for the future she has always dreamed about, and she has been able to do it because of free TAFE. She has been able to do it because, as she said, without free TAFE she would not have been able to afford the course that she was studying to pursue and realise her dream. Elena is just one of 191,000 students across Victoria who are pursuing their career dreams. They have enrolled in free TAFE, and that number includes 90,000 women.

There are some who had a different approach – to cut TAFE, to close campuses, to crush people’s dreams and aspirations. It would have meant people like Elena would not have been able to pursue their dream and go on and be a great early childhood educator. We know that women like Elena and Elizabeth, who we met, and the man called Elias, who we also met at Broadmeadows TAFE that day, all spoke with passion and pride about how free TAFE has opened doors, how the TAFE investment at Broadmeadows and right across the state has provided them with foundations so they can go and work in rewarding and enriching careers that benefit all of us. That is what investment in TAFE looks like. That is backing working people and families right across our state.

*Constituency questions*

**South-West Coast electorate**

**Roma BRITNELL** (South-West Coast) (14:53): (980) My constituency question is to the Minister for Emergency Services, and I ask: how can it be that the new ultra heavy fire tanker delivered to Milltown CFA on 18 December is already out of action with defects? The volunteers drove it around for 10 days before it was taken for its final check at the district mechanics office. I am told the district mechanical officer found three pages of faults. The volunteers do not know what is wrong with it, when it will be fixed or when it will be returned to them. It is dangerous over the summer fire season to be without this truck. Victoria received 12 of these tankers. One wonders whether the other 11 also have the same defects. The Milltown CFA have training tomorrow, and there is no truck. The volunteers have made plans and brought in backup staff to attend this training. This is another fail from

the Allan Labor government, which leaves rural areas with defective trucks, old trucks or insufficient trucks to defend themselves during the hot summer fire season.

**Lara electorate**

**Ella GEORGE** (Lara) (14:54): (981) My question is for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety, and I ask: how is the planning for the Lara Six Ways intersection upgrade progressing? The town of Lara has experienced significant population growth over recent years, which has resulted in additional pressure on local road infrastructure. In 2022 the former member for Lara announced a \$16 million investment by the Victorian government to upgrade this intersection. Works will improve safety, capacity and traffic flow at this busy intersection. This commitment to improving road safety and infrastructure is so important to the residents of Lara as the community continues to grow. I look forward to hearing from the minister about how planning is progressing.

**Ovens Valley electorate**

**Tim McCURDY** (Ovens Valley) (14:55): (982) My question is to the Minister for Energy and Resources, and I seek an urgent response to the power shortages in the King Valley. I ask the minister: when can King Valley residents and businesses expect consistent power supply? I first started receiving distressed calls from families and businesses during the last sitting week, on Thursday 6 February. Bernie Wood from the King Valley has told me 13 power outages have occurred over the last week, lasting from 2 hours to 16 hours. People expect power shortages when a severe storm comes through, and we are all very reasonable and accepting when this occurs. But having 13 outages in the King Valley when there is no inclement weather or no apparent reason gives people the feeling of a Third World country, and we need some answers. Businesses have lost thousands of dollars in wine manufacturing and other food and fibre production. I do hope this is not what we can expect under the new SEC. We need some answers urgently.

**Preston electorate**

**Nathan LAMBERT** (Preston) (14:55): (983) My question is for the Minister for Transport Infrastructure, and my question is: what is the process for getting murals painted on the pylons at Reservoir station? As a tribute to this government's commitment to the arts, since Reservoir station opened in 2019 we have seen a real expansion of public art in our area, including locals murals by Christine Martin, TextaQueen, Abbey Rich and Olana Janfa, Hayden Dewar and a great one next to the next to Reservoir library by local artist Emily Green. We have also seen new sculptures installed at Keon Park station by Joanne Mott, Preston station by Sanné Mestrom, Bell station by Lisa Waup and further down the track by Lewis Wandin-Bursill, and of course further down there we do see murals by Alex Kerr. We were chatting at a Multicultural Arts Victoria roundtable organised by Lauren Mullings last week about how well that art has been received but also the benefits of retrospectively fitting some art to some of our existing infrastructure, including Reservoir station. Any information the minister could provide us would be greatly appreciated.

**Brighton electorate**

**James NEWBURY** (Brighton) (14:56): (984) My question is to the Premier. Why has the state Labor government started work on the Premier's plan for high-rise apartment towers in Brighton despite her commitment to consult with the community first? In October the Premier snuck into my community to announce her plan to build 20-storey high-rise towers. The Premier gave her word that communities around the newly announced activity centres would be consulted. Despite that promise, the government has sneakily started environmental testing this week around Middle Brighton and North Brighton stations on VicTrack land. There is no doubt this testing is preparatory work for the Premier's high-rise tower agenda. As we know, the car parks are the only free land available. All VicTrack will tell residents is that VicTrack has engaged consultants to carry out environmental investigations, that VicTrack will test ground conditions on land it owns and that the information is

used to inform any future works. Despite approaches to the minister and relevant department, both refuse to provide details. The Premier has broken her word.

#### **Sunbury electorate**

**Josh BULL** (Sunbury) (14:57): (985) My question is to the Minister for Carers and Volunteers. Minister, how will the recently announced funding for the Sunbury community Harmony Food Co-Op support those in my electorate of Sunbury? As the minister knows, the community food relief program supports many Victorians who may need additional support or are experiencing hardship and/or food insecurity. I look forward to the minister's response, and I take this opportunity to thank and acknowledge all of those within my community and within the Sunbury electorate who are doing an outstanding job of supporting those who are finding times difficult. I enjoy my positive and proactive engagement with these community groups as they work for the betterment of everyone within the local community.

#### **Ringwood electorate**

**Will FOWLES** (Ringwood) (14:58): (986) My constituency question is for the Minister for Housing and Building in the other place. Last year I raised concerns regarding the vacant site at McDowall Street in Mitcham, where 62 new dwellings were announced as part of the Big Housing Build initiative. Despite the government's claims about record numbers of permit approvals, the public housing wait list continues to grow and my constituents continue to call for more affordable housing. The project at McDowall Street, announced in 2021, has yet to commence construction. Four years since the announcement and the site remains empty. This is not an isolated issue as similar delays are impacting other Big Housing Build projects right across the state. Given the critical need for affordable housing in my community, these delays are not just frustrating but are detrimental to families waiting for a safe and secure place to live. Minister, what steps are being taken to ensure that public housing builds are completed rather than permitted sites sitting vacant for years at a time?

#### **Bayswater electorate**

**Jackson TAYLOR** (Bayswater) (14:59): (987) One of the more exciting projects that is happening in my part of the world, in Knox, is the new dog park and playground at Wantirna reserve, a project that I got started when I was a local councillor there in 2016. My question is to the Minister for Environment. When can we expect to see works start on this very, very exciting project for the local community out in the electorate of Bayswater? This was an election commitment that is now being delivered. It is funded, and Knox council is delivering the project on behalf of the state government. I am pretty sure this is fully funded by the state government, so that is a gold star for us. I cannot wait to see not just my cavoodle Penny out there but all the cavoodles and staffies of the outer east enjoying it for many years to come.

#### **Mildura electorate**

**Jade BENHAM** (Mildura) (15:00): (988) My question is for the Minister for Education. Why is the minister happy to allow the children and staff of Koorlong Primary School to go without shade in the hottest school in the state? Koorlong Primary School is a bushfire at-risk school because of the southern boundary that runs alongside Koorlong State Forest. Last year the audit team removed all of the trees within a 10-metre radius of the school, understanding safety. However, it has been an unusually hot summer this year. For the last five years the school has applied for grants to have shade structures over the basketball court and over their playground, and for the last five years they have been told, 'Not this year – unsuccessful. Try again next year.' Further to that, there is a school in Shepparton about the same size that has three play structures. So why is the minister okay with kids in Koorlong not having shade?

**The SPEAKER:** I would ask the member for Mildura to rephrase her question. In retrospect, looking at the question here, she has asked for an opinion. If the question is why, just ask why. Could you rephrase the question.

**Jade BENHAM:** When will Koorlong Primary School have the shade structure that they have applied for?

#### **Kororoit electorate**

**Luba GRIGOROVITCH** (Kororoit) (15:02): (989) My question is for the Minister for Education. Can the minister confirm if we are on track to deliver Tarneit Plains primary school in Mount Atkinson as part of the 100 new schools by 2026? Since 2014 the Labor government has made significant investments in education, focusing on improving infrastructure, access and quality, and this includes funding for new schools, school upgrades and the redevelopment of existing facilities. With billions invested in building new schools, upgrading facilities and modernising classrooms, the state is paving the way for a brighter future for all students. The Labor government's building new schools fund is addressing the growing demand for education as population increases, with a focus on supporting disadvantaged students, improving teacher quality and enhancing early childhood education, with these 100 new schools creating opportunities for all students to succeed and thrive.

**The SPEAKER:** I ask the member for Kororoit to rephrase her question. She asked for an action from the minister.

**Luba GRIGOROVITCH:** I would like the minister to confirm if they are on track to deliver the Tarneit Plains primary school.

**The SPEAKER:** Maybe the member for Kororoit would like to come and see me after constituency questions, and I will refer her to how to deliver a constituency question.

#### ***Rulings from the Chair***

#### **Constituency questions**

**The SPEAKER** (15:03): I have reviewed the constituency questions from 6 February 2025. The member for Brighton asked two questions for his constituency question. While the questions were related, the questions were sufficiently different that I rule the member for Brighton's constituency question out of order.

**Tim Read:** On a point of order, Speaker, I have got five questions on notice that are now overdue. I am happy to supply those numbers to the Clerk, if that would suit.

**The SPEAKER:** Thank you, member for Brunswick. That would be great.

#### ***Bills***

#### **Justice Legislation Amendment (Anti-vilification and Social Cohesion) Bill 2024**

#### ***Second reading***

#### **Debate resumed.**

**Mary-Anne THOMAS** (Macedon – Leader of the House, Minister for Health, Minister for Ambulance Services) (15:04): I wish to advise the house of amendments to this bill, and I request that they be circulated.

#### **Amendments circulated under standing orders.**

**Mary-Anne THOMAS:** There is a reason that this bill has been held over for a second week. It is not only to enable everyone in this house to have the opportunity to get on their feet and tell us why they will or will not be supporting this important legislation but also so that the government can continue to listen to community members. We have been very clear from the get-go that in introducing this legislation we wanted to hear from community and consult extensively. That is why it was introduced at the end of last year so that we had the whole of summer, and I want to take this opportunity to acknowledge both the former Attorney-General, Jaclyn Symes in the other place, and

our current Attorney-General, the member for Carrum, for the work that they have done to continue to listen to community.

If I could speak to those amendments, I want to be very clear that the Allan government, following further consultations, is moving two amendments to strengthen the Justice Legislation Amendment (Anti-vilification and Social Cohesion) Bill 2024 by removing the political purpose defence from the criminal incitement offence and by adding proselytising and preaching to the civil religious purpose exceptions. Let me talk to you, Acting Speaker, and to the house about why we have taken these actions. Including a genuine political purpose defence to the incitement offence was intended to ensure consistency with the constitutional implied freedom of political communication. It was never intended to expand that protection. The government has continued its conversations with community leaders. We fully acknowledge and appreciate the concern that has been expressed by many that the provision could have been misused, potentially legitimising vilification under the guise of political communication. As such, we will remove the provision, and I want to make sure that doing so will not affect the operation of the offences.

In doing so, can I also point out – because I was listening – the member for Gippsland South in his presentation before said that this was one of the reasons why the opposition were opposing it. That has gone. We have done that because we listen, and we are proud of that. True leadership is actually making a decision that you will bring into this place legislation that has been challenging to write and craft and get right, and you will continue to listen and refine in order to deliver the very best, most workable legislation that you can. We believe that existing general statutory and common-law defences, such as self-defence, duress and the defence of mental impairment, apply to the offences, and this is consistent with the current law. As I have just indicated, it is now up to the Liberal Party to show whether they also stand with many Victorian communities, including Victoria's Jewish community, who want to see this bill passed.

Secondly, with regard to the civil religious purpose exceptions, the bill strengthens civil anti-vilification protections with incitement and harm provisions, and existing exceptions are retained. The religious purpose exception had minor amendments to make the language consistent with other legislation, protecting worship, observance, practice and teaching. But we heard concerns that the revised language could have the effect of narrowing the exception, and that was never our intention. Therefore we will add the words 'proselytising' and 'preaching' to make that crystal clear. I know that this also responds to feedback that we had from faith leaders, and we have been pleased to be able to listen to them and incorporate their concerns. This exception is necessary to balance rights and ensure legitimate activities are not against the law. The government will always stand with Victorians and their right to practice religion, so these are the amendments that we are introducing today.

I come before you today both as the member for Macedon and as the Minister for Health and Minister for Ambulance Services, and I want to say a few things about why this bill is so important. We know that vilification, racism, homophobia and antisemitism all have real impacts on people's health and wellbeing, and it has been one of my focal points of work with our health services to increase cultural safety in our hospitals. A focus of that has been on our First Nations people, who we know of course do not have the same health outcomes as non-Indigenous people in our state. But I am firmly of the belief that if we can work to make our health services culturally safe for Aboriginal people, they will be culturally safe for many more people, including people from minorities. So it is really, really important that we pass this legislation.

Can I also say that there have been instances – shocking, horrifying, vile instances – that we have seen in New South Wales of antisemitism in our health services. This is completely and utterly unacceptable. Health services have to be places of safety, and they have to be places of safety for people no matter what their background, their religion, their politics, their sexuality or their gender. They have to be places of safety for patients and places of safety for health workers, and while I will always respect the rights of people to hold political positions and to take strong positions in relation to tragic world events, including the disaster that is the war in Gaza, it is not appropriate to bring those

opinions and views into a healthcare setting, because it does not create safety for patients and it does not create safety for the workforce. So it is really important that we do everything that we can and that we are obliged to do to stamp out hurtful hate speech and hurtful actions of hate. This bill is a very important legislative step to ensure that we can do more to stamp out vilification of people based on a range of attributes.

We have also heard today – and again I want to reference my good friend the member for Thomastown, because I have been out to Epping many times with the member for Thomastown – what happened to two women in the Epping plaza, which was truly horrifying and shocking. The police have indicated that they believe that this is an attack that is based on prejudice, and again it has no place in our society. It is incumbent on all of us in this place to do everything that we can to support social cohesion – that is, to respect the rights of all Victorians to be who they are, to love who they love and to worship the gods who they want to without fear of being vilified or, even worse, subject to physical attack as these two women at the Epping plaza were. It was absolutely shocking.

Finally, I have spoken a little bit about why this is important to me as health minister. This bill is really important to me as the member for Macedon. We are proudly home to one of the largest regional LGBTQ+ communities in the nation, and we celebrate our LGBTQ+ community at the annual event called ChillOut; it is an amazing event to which everyone in this chamber is welcome at all times. I want to say I am in awe of people in my community who have worked so hard over so many years to ensure that not just Daylesford but Hepburn and Kyneton and Trentham and all the towns in my community are warm and welcoming places for our LGBTQ+ community. Again, there are many places around our nation that could learn from my community and learn the lessons of acceptance, of kindness, of respect. It is not that hard.

It did occur to me that there are other names that we could have given this bill: ‘Just don’t be a bad person’; ‘Don’t be a terrible person’; ‘Be kind’; ‘Be nice’. Just respect others – that is all that we are asking people to do through this bill. I commend it to the house, but I will say this: the buck stops with the Liberal Party. We have addressed some of their concerns, and I have got to tell you that there are many, many people in this community who want to see this bill passed, and it would be a day of great shame should the Liberal Party vote this down. I commend the bill to the house.

**Chris CREWTER** (Mornington) (15:15): I rise to speak on the Justice Legislation Amendment (Anti-vilification and Social Cohesion) Bill 2024 before the Assembly today. This bill extends anti-vilification laws beyond ethnicity and religion to also cover disability, sex, sex characteristics, sexual orientation, gender identity and personal association with a protected person. It also includes tougher criminal penalties and introduces new serious vilification offences for inciting hate or making threats based on protected attributes, with penalties of up to five years imprisonment. It also does quite a number of other things which a number of other speakers have already talked about, so I will not repeat them once again.

I note that last sitting week the government, as part of this bill, introduced a political defence for incitement, ‘genuine political purpose’. I note that the Leader of the House has now put forward an amendment on this issue. After much pressure, this government has finally started to listen to Jewish community groups, other faith community groups and the opposition and is removing this problematic provision. However, they should have listened in the very first place. As I know and as we know – and I know in particular as the Opposition Whip, having received the email – the government originally planned to both debate and vote on this bill last sitting week but then changed it to debate only, purportedly at the time to give members more of a say. But as the Leader of the House has confirmed just now, it was not just about giving members more of a say, it was also because of concerns raised by Jewish community groups and many others. They have admitted the fact that there were these concerns that were not listened to in the first place. They should have waited until they were ready to debate the bill rather than introducing it when they were not ready.

I note as well that the bill also explicitly includes the terms ‘preaching’ and ‘proselytising’ in the government’s definition of religious purpose. Legitimate religious activities such as preaching, teaching and advocating spiritual beliefs should never be lumped in with hateful conduct, but the bill still uses a subjective standard in its harm-based provisions, which I will go into more later.

There are a number of key concerns regarding this bill. Firstly, there is the overreach and potential threat to freedom of speech and freedom of religion. This bill risks stifling legitimate political expression like protests against state actors and political ideologies. Also, the definition of race in the bill – albeit it is my view that we should move on from using this term – includes nationality or national origin, which could mean criticism of foreign governments is misinterpreted as vilification. In addition, broad and vague references to social cohesion could allow laws to be weaponised to silence dissent and protest.

A second key concern relates to the expansion of criminal offences. Five years of imprisonment is disproportionate in many cases for expression-based offences. The definition of ‘incite’ is way too broad, capturing even subtle speech, and creates a lot of uncertainty in legal application. And the threshold for criminal vilification is lowered to recklessness instead of intent, making it way too easy to prosecute for speech-based offences.

A third key concern relates to religious implications. The harm-based provision is subjective, allowing individuals to define what is harmful, making it easier to silence religious or moral views simply because someone feels offended. This is the biggest red flag with this bill, allowing courts or indeed complainants to drill down to narrower subgroups within a faith or community to determine harm, creating enormous legal uncertainty. One example is, say, the distinctions between Sunni and Shia Muslims or between and within other religious groups, such as within Christianity. This is a highly subjective approach which is confusing and unpredictable. Protections and outcomes might differ even within the same faith or community if sensitivities vary between different subgroups.

Also I note the expanded definition of ‘public’ means the law could apply to sermons, religious teachings, masses and social media posts, even if shared in private settings. And religious teachings and moral views could still be targeted if somebody simply feels that they are harmful, even if it aligns with centuries-old faith traditions and doctrines. Basically the government will or may have unprecedented authority over what religious groups and other groups in our community can say.

I do note that these amendments that have been circulated today by the Leader of the House do address some of these concerns, but, as noted, the bill still uses a subjective standard in its harm-based provision which, in my view and the view of many colleagues and many in the community, will impact upon freedom of speech and freedom of religion.

I want to just give some quotes from some of my constituents that I have been listening to about this issue in the electorate of Mornington. Mat from Mornington said:

I fear that this Bill could further divide our community if it is weaponized against political opponents. I urge you to reconsider this legislation and ensure that the rights of Christians and other religious groups are fully protected.

In addition, Keith from Mount Martha said:

I am genuinely worried that the law would divide the community ...

Kate from Mornington said:

As a Christian, I am worried that the low vilification threshold and subjective elements in the law could put Christians at risk of litigation.

Robert from Mornington said:

I call for the abandonment of this Bill as I believe it poses a threat to the religious freedom of Christians in Victoria.



And Jody from Mount Martha said:

... I urge you to abandon the bill to protect the rights and freedoms of Christians in our society.

I have also heard from many others from both faith and non-faith groups, from Christians through to Muslims and many others, about their concerns about this bill, particularly about the subjective elements of this bill.

Overall, as noted by my colleagues, the coalition will be opposing this bill because we believe that the subjective test for harm still raises substantial concerns and, as the member for Evelyn noted earlier, we had asked for consideration in detail on this bill which was denied by the government, which actually would have given us further opportunity to look at some of the elements of this bill in more detail. With the excessive subjectivity, vague thresholds and potential for overreach, we cannot in good conscience support it. Of course we do not want people vilifying others, but this bill goes too far and will stifle or potentially stifle freedoms, including freedom of speech and freedom of religion.

In my maiden speech to this house I said:

I will stand up for people of faith or non-faith to freely speak their mind.

I also note a famous quote from Sir Robert Menzies, the founder of the Liberal Party, who said:

Stagnant waters are level, and in them the scum rises. Active waters are never level ... they purify themselves in a few hundred yards.

When we allow for a diversity of ideas and opinions and views in our community, we allow for the best outcomes, and we also allow for those views to be criticised publicly. When you suppress things, you sometimes create more problems in society in the long run.

I note that our reasoned amendment still remains in place with respect to this bill as well, and I will read that again:

That all the words after ‘That’ be omitted and replaced with the words ‘this house refuses to read this bill a second time until the Allan Labor government:

- (a) urgently considers additional options, including those available to Victoria Police, as a practical means of tackling antisocial and vilifying behaviours; and
- (b) consults further with Victoria’s faith groups, including the Jewish and Islamic communities, who have warned the government that the proposed ‘genuine political purpose’ defence to incitement will damage social cohesion in this state.’

To conclude, I ask that the government further consider and further consult with respect to this bill. I ask that the government reconsider what they have done with respect to denying consideration in detail. It will of course go through the lower house with the numbers that the government has in this place, but I ask that before it goes through the upper house they further consider amendments to this bill and perhaps actually consider withdrawing it altogether, particularly given that I do not think sufficient consultation has taken place and, given the subjective harm, may well harm people of faith, harm freedom of religion, harm freedom of speech. We need to be a Victoria that actually looks after people of faith and that encourages freedom of expression, and that is something that we always stand up for in the Liberal Party and within the coalition.

**Will Fowles:** Acting Speaker Tak, my point of order relates to the introduction of these substantial amendments to this legislation. I am seeking leave, notwithstanding the fact that I have already spoken on this bill, to speak to those amendments.

**Leave refused.**

**Will Fowles:** Further to the point of order, Acting Speaker, section 157, subsection (5), of the standing orders provides that a proposed amendment may be withdrawn with the leave of the house. I previously moved an amendment to the reasoned amendment moved by the member for Malvern. Given that the government has now proposed to amend this legislation, my reasoned amendment is

no longer pertinent, and I seek the leave of the house to withdraw my amendment to the member for Malvern's reasoned amendment.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Standing order 157 does allow for an amendment to be withdrawn with leave of the house. Is leave granted?

**Leave refused.**

**Will Fowles:** On a point of order, I seek some guidance, Deputy Speaker. We are left with the farcical notion that we might have an amendment to a reasoned amendment being put to the chamber when no-one supports it, including the mover of that amendment to the reasoned amendment. In those circumstances I do not think it is a particularly complicated matter. In order to help focus the debate for the balance of the debating time on this legislation, I wonder whether either the minister at the table or others could seek some urgent guidance from their colleagues, because to continue to have the amendment to the reasoned amendment tabled risks tipping us into a pretty farcical territory.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** I think I understand the logic of the member's argument. However, the debate is the same debate with amendments. Therefore, if leave is not granted, as it was not – does the minister wish to speak on the point of order?

**Steve Dimopoulos:** On the point of order, Deputy Speaker, if I understand it, the member for Ringwood seeks leave to withdraw his amendment to the member for Malvern's reasoned amendment. If that is all that the member is seeking leave for, that is fine.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Member for Ringwood, if you wish to re-ask the question, we will go through the process.

**Will Fowles:** On a point of order, Deputy Speaker – it will come as a great surprise to the house – section 157, subsection (5), of the standing orders provides that a proposed amendment may be withdrawn with the leave of the house. I moved an amendment to the member for Malvern's reasoned amendment. That is the process demanded by these standing orders; it is clunky, but that is the process nonetheless demanded by the standing orders. The effect of that amendment to the reasoned amendment was to simply have a reasoned amendment that the bill be withdrawn until such time as the government had consulted more broadly on, in particular, the 'genuine political purpose' defence. The government has now done that. They have signalled in amendments circulated just now that they are proposing to remove that 'genuine political purpose' defence. I think that is terrific. I congratulate them for that. I am very pleased that they have come around to my view on that. On that basis I seek to withdraw my amendment to the member for Malvern's reasoned amendment.

**Leave granted and amendment withdrawn.**

**Tim RICHARDSON (Mordialloc) (15:29):** I do not think I have sat down and jumped up more times. So there we go; I have got the squats up.

I would like to welcome the changes to the Justice Legislation Amendment (Anti-vilification and Social Cohesion) Bill 2024. It has been an important journey for a number of years to get this legislation to this point in time, led by some work of this Parliament. It is an opportunity to reflect again on the important work of committees to bring complex legislation into being. The work of a cross-parliamentary inquiry into anti-vilification protections in 2021 set the scene for this legislative reform of some significance. Like any piece of legislation that has significant challenges in the restriction of speech and restriction of certain rights to balance the protections against vilification and impact and harm in our community, there are tensions and challenges that we face. So these house amendments are a demonstration of the work that we do to make things fair, to make things right and to also be open to dialogue on those changes.

I contrast that to some of the bill discussions that we have seen from the coalition, who were fundamentally opposed to this in all its elements, in all its rights. In fact last sitting week they moved

a reasoned amendment and had no interest in going any further. Barely did we see too many speakers on that side really go into the detail that we have seen further as well. The coalition has asked for committee interrogation of a bill that it is completely opposed to and does not want to move any amendments, besides the member for Mornington – and it was a little on brand to quote Menzies in some of his dialogue – who has a genuine concern and has raised that. We would disagree with some of the things put forward. He has read out on behalf of his constituents the narration of that. That is the appropriate discussion. We will have that tension out, and it will be voted upon. That is the kind of contribution that is needed. I would differ on and argue some of the protections that have been formed and some of the amendments that clarify – they are not wholesale. It is clarification in respect of our faith-based communities and religious organisations, who are such a large part of who we are as a society and a community in Victoria. It is a recognition of that ongoing discussion and consultation, in the open and transparent way that we have had this discussion with a range of leaders. Maybe the members opposite might reflect on that and the engagement that has been had to this point.

But I think fundamentally I am really struggling with the narration in this Parliament, of a severe deterioration in what we see in the targeting of certain communities like we have never seen before. Some of the rise in hate speech that we have seen around our communities recently has been platformed on mainstream media, and we have seen targeting of the Jewish community, with antisemitism rising in our community. They are some of the most corrosive and toxic elements, and we have to call them out. We have to front up to that. For coalition members on that side to say in one frame, ‘We need to do so much more, we are not doing enough; we need Victoria Police to be empowered more, the government needs to do more,’ and then to come to this bill and oppose some of those changes that will create the legislative framework to protect and support vulnerable Victorians who fear for their lives right now, is one of the most egregious examples of hypocrisy our Parliament has seen in some time. We have members of the community who fear going about their business, who they are and who they identify as, with thousands of years of faith and identity. It is an absolute travesty where we find ourselves right now.

We see members opposite criticise leaders of the Commonwealth and leaders of Victoria and then come in and totally oppose a bill that goes towards addressing some of these elements. I have to say I am really glad that the political purpose defence is a feature of some of these house amendments, because we cannot have political debate be a shield and window-dressing for severe hate and alienation of communities. We cannot have that as an element. That was not its intent. It was to line up with constitutional elements in our rights and responsibilities charter. I nearly said bill of rights, and as another learned friend over there said, it would not be the bill of rights; it would be under the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006. When you see those clarifications, that is a really important step and approach that we need to take.

But I am absolutely astonished at some of the commentary that has changed positions over time. It is a challenge for the Leader of the Opposition: why have they walked back significant defences for people who have been targeted in our community? Why is it dressed up in a free speech element when members of his shadow cabinet are pleading for intervention, particularly after the targeting of Jewish Victorians and Australians at a time of significant volatility? Why is it okay to oppose this bill that aims to address some of those challenges and establish an important conversation in Victoria around calling out antisemitism and addressing the toxicity of this and the growing elements and extremism that we see?

We have seen extreme elements in political ideology play out in tragic circumstances in our state and our nation before, and we are at a critical point in time now when we need to address and front up to these challenges and traumas. We have seen some horrific examples. The Adass Israel example in recent times was a terrifying and traumatic experience. It was not just a random incident or attack. It was planned, it was meticulous and it had no regard for any loss of life or impact. It struck at the heart of trying to dress up terror and cause ongoing fear and trauma in the Jewish community. This is where I really am interested: coming in here with a reasoned amendment that talks about some of the

technical elements of this bill or, in this discussion, not letting perfect be the enemy of the good. What are the reasons that the coalition are opposed to a bill that I see at its heart as looking to protect vulnerable Victorians and Australians right now, in one of the most damaging and toxic times that we have seen? We literally have elements celebrating neo-Nazism in our state right now that have been platformed by mainstream media, and that is being used as a recruiting tool.

When we see radicalisations in other communities, we strike at that moment, and this is a bill for this moment. This is a bill in this time to address some of these concerns into the future. If you are not happy about some of the elements, if you are not happy about some of the protections that it suggests, come in and move those amendments or discuss it with that integrity. Do not say one thing out there, like, ‘We need more powers and more protections than ever before,’ and then come in here and say that the existing legislation is enough. That has been the commentary of the Leader of the Opposition: that it is enough, that the current state of play in protecting vulnerable communities is enough, even though we see targeting of Jewish communities. We saw the horrific example in Epping recently for Muslim communities and a general fear. There are faith-based communities and schools in my area who are of Muslim faith who are terrified or get threats, who have to deal with that and who have to front up to security grants just to make sure that their kids are safe walking into their school. At a time of such vulnerability, such a deterioration in respect for others and a monetarisation of hate – and that is what we see. When you see the platforming of some of this far-right extremism right now, there is a quest to recruit and there is a quest to monetarise.

It is going to take our collective will and sometimes giving up a bit of political window or the political grab of the day to do what is good and to do what is right. That is where a committee structure like this has brought a piece of legislation forward that is for our times. I plead for those opposite and I plead for the Greens representatives here to think about the consequences of inaction, think about not having a collective purpose here to erode and challenge and drive out some of the more hateful elements that we have seen like never before. Anyone that has fronted up to some of the Holocaust memorial recognitions – you have that opportunity as a member of Parliament – you go through and it is hard not to be absolutely horrified, moved, that this is within a 80-year period, that this happened at the time of our grandparents. A federal member in my area, the federal Attorney-General Mark Dreyfus, has shared his lived experience of the impact on his family. If we do not address this in communities now and we do not stamp it out, it slides and deteriorates into so many other facets of our life. That is the challenge. Can we be big enough for the moment, pass this groundbreaking legislation to protect others into the future and do what is truly Victorian: show love, show compassion and embrace. That is what this bill is all about.

**Tim READ** (Brunswick) (15:40): I rise to speak very briefly about our position on these amendments. The bill, as you will recall, expands the list of attributes that are protected from just race and religion to now include gender identity, sex, sex characteristics, sexual orientation, disability and personal association. However, the Greens have already urged the government to include gender expression, bloodborne virus status, homelessness, immigration status and lawful sexual activity in the protected attributes. These new laws will also make it easier to pursue vilification in a civil matter through the courts when someone has been vilified and is seeking compensation, an apology or an injunction. We are also in favour of these changes because it has been too difficult to use the civil provisions so far.

With regard to the latest amendments, however, we have heard concerns from experts that the criminal provisions of the bill could be used by police or others to stifle legitimate political comment. They could be weaponised, and indeed there is a long history in this state of marginalised communities being overpoliced. There is a real risk that the bill in its latest iteration will be weaponised against people who are least able to defend themselves. So we look forward to the outcome of discussions with the Attorney-General’s office to see how the Greens and the government can further improve the bill, particularly in the upper house.

**Jacinta ALLAN** (Bendigo East – Premier) (15:42): We on this side of the house have a very simple belief: whoever you are and wherever you are from, whoever you pray to and whoever you love, you deserve to be safe in our state, free of hate, and that is what our anti-vilification and social cohesion bill is all about.

This is a bill that had as its genesis an act of racism and Islamophobia that occurred in my own community. I will never forget what happened in my beautiful home town, and I will never forget the way our community responded. They stared down racism and offered love. If you look around Bendigo today, you will find one of the most accepting, welcoming and diverse communities anywhere in our state, and you will also see a mosque and an Islamic community centre under construction. That sickening Nazi act was a deliberate attempt to pull at the fabric of our multicultural society, and it set this government on a mission to deliver a set of laws to protect Victorians from hateful speech and hateful conduct that profoundly hurts us all. We need that now more than ever. Racism, sexism and intolerance exist in this country. Nazis exist in this country. Antisemitism exists in this country. Homophobia and transphobia exist in this country. Islamophobia exists in this country. You can find it on YouTube. You can find it in public. In December last year you could find it in Berwick at Guru Nanak Lake. You could find it in Ripponlea. You could find it on the front steps of this Parliament. And last week you could find it in Epping plaza. It is hurting us all and it is dividing us all.

These laws cannot stop every act of hate, but they are extra tools, extra powers for police and also for communities to help keep Victorians safe. I will step briefly through how they will work. Firstly, the bill will expand protection from vilification, which is the worst kind of hate speech or conduct and profoundly hurts people. There are already legal protections against vilification for race and religion, but we are going to expand those protections so they cover people with a disability, they cover women, they cover people from our LGBTIQ+ community and more, because that is what equality means. Secondly, this bill will crack down on further criminal vilification. It toughens the existing laws so they will be easier to prove and they will incur stronger penalties of up to five years imprisonment. Thirdly, this bill provides more options to people if they have been harmed, and it does this through introducing a civil framework for victims to seek remedy and resolution to complement the criminal framework.

Finally and fourthly, this bill will protect freedoms. It recognises the rights of communities to follow and share and preach their own beliefs, and more importantly, it is all about protecting people's right to practise and identify with their religion free from harm in public.

As has been referred to previously, the government will today move two important amendments. We said when we introduced this bill to the Parliament late last year that we would listen to communities and we would consult with communities and respond to what we heard, and we have. We said we were prepared to make amendments if it meant the bill would be used and understood better in the community, and we have. Firstly, there is an amendment that clarifies a religious purpose that includes proselytising and preaching. We always intended that, and we accept the views of community leaders who have shared their thoughts with us that inserting these words into the definition makes it even clearer. Secondly, the other amendment ensures that the 'limited political purpose' defence can never be used to excuse vilifying conduct, and it does that by removing it. It was never the government's intention for the defence to be used in this way. We thank the community groups who have worked with us and shared their concerns, and we have responded. With these amendments we can now take this bill forward and bring it closer to reality.

To bring it to reality we need the support of the Parliament. We have heard a lot of talk from the Liberal Party in the last week that they could not support these laws with the political defence issue outstanding. It is no longer outstanding. It has now been addressed to the satisfaction of a wide range of community voices. I thank the Jewish community for their statements this morning about the necessity of this legislation. We made that decision because it is the right thing to do. We listened; we acted. But it saddens me – the Liberal Party have discovered a new reason to oppose this bill, and I

fear we could amend this bill a thousand ways and they would oppose it a thousand times. It is now clear to me they do not oppose this bill because of the political defence, they do not oppose it because of the subjective test, they oppose it because it offers equal protection to LGBTIQ+ Victorians. This is the Victorian Liberal Party under its new leader.

We have an opportunity to deliver a bipartisan law to deal with the challenges we see on our streets – and they are grave and troubling challenges we see on our streets. These laws will be the strongest in the country. We know that there are Liberal members of Parliament in this place who support this bill. I know this because I was at a community event last year when the member for Hawthorn as the then Leader of the Liberal Party said that this legislation could not be delayed a moment longer. And I know in my heart there are other Liberal members of Parliament who do not feel the slightest bit comfortable about their party's stance.

We all have a choice to stand with Victorian people against hate, antisemitism, racism and discrimination in all its forms or, in the Liberal Party, to stand with the hard right, who want to sink this bill. And if they choose to sink it, they will have to explain themselves to the Jewish community, to the Hindu community and to all Victorians, multicultural and multifaith communities why they gave up not just a golden opportunity but a generational opportunity to act in a bipartisan way to deal with the hate and division we are seeing in our society – hate and division that we in this place can take action on by strengthening the law and supporting multifaith and multicultural communities.

Ultimately, if they oppose it, I hope it is worth it for the Liberal Party, because stopping hate and crime is absolutely worth it to me. I will keep on fighting for those Victorians who need us in this place to fight for them – to fight for them for stronger protections, to fight for them to stamp out evil and hate and to fight for them for a strong, cohesive community, which we all know we have here in Victoria. We just have to work incredibly hard to keep it strong, and we do so from this place with this bill. I commend the bill to the house.

**Eden FOSTER** (Mulgrave) (15:50): I do not know how I can follow our Premier in speaking to this bill. It is an honour to stand so soon after our Premier, but I am so pleased to rise today in support of the Justice Legislation Amendment (Anti-vilification and Social Cohesion) Bill 2024. I thank the Attorney-General for introducing this bill. There are many on this side of this place who want to talk on this bill, so many that I was battling with my colleague here on who got to speak first.

**Paul Edbrooke:** You won!

**Eden Foster:** And I won, and it is an honour, but I notice also on the other side that there are not too many speaking on this. I think there is a sense of shame perhaps in the fact that they are not here to speak on this.

**A member** interjected.

**Eden Foster:** It certainly does show their values or lack thereof. This bill gives effect to recommendations from the 2021 Victorian parliamentary inquiry into anti-vilification protections. The first recommendation was one of the most important: the expansion of anti-vilification laws to go beyond race and religious belief and also protect the attributes of gender identity, sex, sex characteristics, sexual orientation and personal association with a person or group with a protected attribute. Further protected attributes include disability, mental illness – which is close to my heart as a psychologist – and HIV/AIDS status. All of these are commendable developments which align with modern Victorian and, might I add, Aussie values. We have a duty to address hate and vilification in our community. No matter where we may have come from, as Australians it is in our blood to help out a mate, to look out for each other and to lend a hand. Put simply, it is the Australian spirit, and it is probably a reason why my mum chose to come to Australia, because of its welcoming nature, because of its mateship to care for our fellow person.

This bill supports and expands upon those community values and entrenches them in law, which can only be a good thing. It is sad that some in our community continue to vilify others on the basis of their identity and lifestyle. This is why measures in this bill make it clear that hate will not be accepted in our state, delivering harsh penalties for those that incite and carry out vilification, because it is simply not who we are as Victorians and it is the right thing for us to do.

Inciting hate against, serious contempt for, revulsion towards or severe ridicule of another person or group of persons on the grounds of a protected attribute will be punishable by up to three years imprisonment. This offence is entirely reserved for extremely serious offences which promote the strongest forms of hate and discrimination, so I am not sure what those opposite are scared of. The harshest of offences will be punished by up to five years imprisonment. Again, this is reserved for the most severe of offences, such as threatening physical harm or damaging personal property based on a protected attribute.

In times of global uncertainty, social cohesion is vital, and this bill will work to stop hate and vilification in our Victorian community. Some of the changes from the 2021 Victorian parliamentary inquiry into anti-vilification protections have already been enacted, including the banning of the use of the Nazi symbol in 2022, followed by the 2023 ban of the Nazi salute and other symbols and gestures used by Nazi sympathisers.

We on this side are against Nazis. Those on the other side – I do not know. We have seen some rallies where Nazis attended. It is quite concerning. To not support this is equally concerning, if not more so. If you have got a rally and you have got Nazis attending there, why not support this to show them that you are not backing them but you are backing these anti-vilification laws? I just do not understand – I really do not understand. We have seen these laws in place. They have been working, and they have been preventing those who want to loudly parade racism and antisemitism in the community from feeling that they have a right to do so.

Just as the government regularly assesses the effectiveness of previous changes, these new anti-vilification laws will also be closely monitored to evaluate their practical impact. The Allan Labor government have shown their willingness to act swiftly on community feedback, even as the final decisions are currently happening. That is why there are two amendments before the house today and why the bill also includes a statutory review of these changes, which must occur no later than five years after the commencement of such changes.

I would also like to speak a little of my own experience of racism. Whilst I grew up in Springvale and loved its growing diversity in the 1980s and 90s and still do, as a woman of colour I have experienced racism of my own, whether it was being told to go back to where you came from, witnessing my mum being told to go back to where she came from, being overlooked when waiting to be served or, even worse, being overlooked for a job or a promotion.

I have had a number of different jobs as a psychologist, from working with children in schools to working with those affected by drugs and alcohol, and through my experience I have seen the devastating effects that discrimination and hate can have on both adults and children. Working with young people is an honour, but it also can be quite hurtful to hear some of their experiences. For some of the young people that I have provided counselling for in my years, whether they have battled with their sexuality or their gender identity or whether they have been quite certain about it, hearing certain anti-LGBTQI+ rhetoric is damaging, and I have seen firsthand what that does to young people. I get emotional about this because it is close to my heart and I have seen the damage that it can do, whether it be self-harm or whether it be suicide attempts. It is damaging. I do not understand why those opposite refuse to support this. They are refusing to support our young people. They refuse to support the vulnerable in our community. They refuse to support people with mental illness that are vilified because of something that they cannot help or those with disability that are discriminated against just because they look different. How can those on the other side not support this bill? It is completely wrong, and I ask them to question themselves and question their conscience.

This bill will move the serious vilification offences to the Crimes Act 1958, where they should be, and the civil anti-vilification protections to the Equal Opportunity Act 2010. By moving serious vilification offences to the Crimes Act we make clear the severity of this conduct and reiterate that hate and vilification will not be accepted in Victoria. The 2024 *Understanding Reporting Barriers and Support Needs for those Experiencing Racism in Victoria* report found that 76 per cent of those surveyed reported that they or someone in their care had experienced racism, just like me and my mum. Additionally, the Islamophobia Register Australia has reported a 600 per cent increase in reported incidents since the end of 2023. Accordingly, the Allan Labor government has been actively trying to protect our communities and children during these challenging times.

I am fortunate to have the incredible Minaret College within the Mulgrave electorate. The Allan Labor government have been great supporters of the school, creating impressive new learning and assembly spaces for students to enjoy and feel safe in. But in the face of rising Islamophobia we have been proactive in protecting our children, with Minaret College receiving \$156,900 from the safer faith-based place grants.

The safety and wellbeing of Minaret students, parents and staff is important to me and the Allan Labor government. Treating these crimes with the seriousness that they warrant is a necessary step to delivering that safety and moving them from the Racial and Religious Tolerance Act into the Crimes Act and Equal Opportunity Act is an important part of the raft of measures we are undertaking to strengthen social cohesion and protect our beloved communities here in Victoria.

I might start wrapping up, with only 10 seconds or thereabouts to go. I unequivocally commend this bill to the house.

**Iwan WALTERS** (Greenvale) (16:00): It is a pleasure to rise to follow that impassioned contribution from the member for Mulgrave, whose words talked about the profound impact that the kinds of harmful, hurtful, offensive, vilifying behaviours that this bill seeks to address and to counter have upon people and had upon a younger member for Mulgrave and her mother. It is also a pleasure to rise to follow the Premier, who set out the journey of the Justice Legislation Amendment (Anti-vilification and Social Cohesion) Bill 2024 to this place over a very long period of time. I know that the Minister for Veterans played a central role along with other members of the house in considering these issues very deeply through the parliamentary process and considering whether Victoria's laws were best placed to deal with the kinds of hatred perpetrated and visited upon religious communities – people who were vilified on the basis of their faith in the aftermath of the abomination that took place in Christchurch in March 2019. The overview of this bill has been well traversed, and the Premier talked about why it is relevant, why it is necessary and the impact it will have in communities like hers.

I want to talk about the impact that this bill will have in communities like mine in expanding anti-vilification protections and building upon protections from racial and religious vilification to also include the attributes of disability. This is something that is very dear to me as a past Parliamentary Secretary for Disability but also as somebody who has a deep personal relationship with people with disability and who is part of the broader disability community. The hurt that is occasioned by people being vilified on account of fundamentally who they are – whether that is on the basis of their race, their ethnicity, their religion or their disability, or any of the other characteristics that this bill seeks to protect – has a consequence. It perpetrates a harm. It inflicts a hurt. Government cannot always do everything and regulation cannot fully regulate away that hate, but governments have a role to play in setting out what is deemed acceptable behaviour in a jurisdiction and empowering police to take action where that action is necessary.

We are dealing with some fundamental precepts here, I think. We are a liberal democracy where diversity is manifest in each one of our electorates. In the member for Broadmeadows' electorate neighbouring mine and in my area, we know this very well. We represent communities that are drawn together from all over the world. We are at citizenship ceremonies every single week, where 165 new



citizens, in the context of Hume, are joining our community. They bring with them historical, linguistic, cultural, ethnic and religious traditions stretching back thousands of years in many instances, and that adds to and augments the diversity that we already have in Victoria.

One of those important characteristics is the faith of those people who are joining our communities. The member for Broadmeadows and I are proud to represent communities where well over 80 per cent of residents profess a faith. It is deeply important to them, to their families and to the way in which they live their lives. I assert, as I have done since I came to this place and did in my very first speech, that faith communities and people of faith have an important role to play, including in the public sphere and in the delivery of services, whether that is faith-based education, the hospitals that so many of us rely upon and many other dimensions.

Fundamentally, I think we are a community that is abundantly tolerant – overwhelmingly tolerant – and it is the exceptions to that which are so offensive I think to our sense of who we are as Victorians and who we are as Australians. Predominantly we are people who live and let live, and we want people to be happy irrespective of their faith, their sexuality or their gender – any of the characteristics that this bill seeks to protect. But too often that is not the case. I loop the member for Broadmeadows into my contribution again, because the communities we represent share so many common characteristics. We have spoken with many of our mosque communities recently about the insidious hurt that is being perpetrated against them, particularly women, because of the visibility of their faith through the wearing of the hijab and other head coverings.

In my current role as the Parliamentary Secretary for Multicultural Affairs, I have also been speaking at great length with faith leaders from the Islamic community and also just people who I meet in the context of my role as the member for Greenvale, who talk about the hurt that ignorant, ill-informed hatred has upon them in their day-to-day lives. It inhibits their capacity to live their life to the fullest, to feel comfortable and confident in professing their faith and being who they are. This bill seeks to do something about that, and I cannot fathom why those on the other side would not wish to protect people of faith from abuse, vilification and hatred. The Muslim community has talked at length with me and other members, I know, about the kinds of episodes that were discussed earlier, at Epping Plaza, but that sadly is not an outlier. It is something which is experienced by far too many people on a regular basis across Victoria more broadly.

I want to talk about a couple of the amendments that the Leader of the House tabled recently, which included adding proselytising and preaching into the civil religious purpose exceptions. I really thank the Leader of the House and others, including the current Attorney-General and the previous Attorney-General, who were engaged in incredibly extensive consultation with religious leaders and others across Victoria to ensure that the bill that we have on the table reflects their concerns and accommodates those concerns about the imperative to ensure that we sustain freedom of faith and freedom of religion in our community.

I share the faith of many people in my community, and I have been privileged to join many of them in sharing the mass at St Charbel in Greenvale, St Carlo Borromeo in Greenvale, St George Chaldean parish in Campbellfield and the Holy Spirit Syriac church just in recent weeks and to hear the feedback that members of our community have had for whom freedom of faith is not an abstract concept. They have come from countries and other parts of the world where vilification of them on the basis of their faith has not just been about words, but it has been something deeply visceral and it has resulted in members of their family being targeted, attacked, killed, forced from their homes, driven into other parts of the world as refugees and ultimately to settle in Australia. So when members of my community raise issues around the freedom of religion, the capacity to freely express their faith, it is not an abstract concept. It is something which matters deeply to my community and to me, so I am deeply glad that the bill now includes the words ‘proselytising’ and ‘preaching’ in the civil and religious purpose exceptions. It was always the case that the government intended to ensure that the capacity of Victorians to practise their faith freely was not trammelled by this bill, and I am confident that it now does not. I thank the religious leaders who provided their feedback to the government to ensure that

those amendments continue to protect the rights of people of faith to practise that without hindrance or fear.

There have been too many disquieting occasions I think in this place recently when members of this place have deeply cynically, offensively and divisively sought to mislead and manipulate our faith communities, to suggest and to purport somehow that this Parliament is intending to remove prayer, for example, or is seeking to restrict the capacity of religious communities to have schools that reflect their values, their teachings and their traditions. This is simply untrue. It has been untrue at every turn. It is something which is divisive, which is wilfully misleading, and it seeks to I think stoke division on the basis of faith and within our faith communities. I hope that this bill that is on the table now with these amendments does not become another opportunity for that behaviour to occur.

I again assert the importance of people in my community being able to fully express and practise their faith, whether that be the Chaldean faith, the Orthodox faith, the Islamic faith, the Buddhist faith or the Hindu faith. We have a profusion of faith communities across the north, and they play an integral role in our community. Their contribution to our broader state is also important. It cannot be understated. I thank the Attorney-General. I thank the Premier for her words. I thank all of those who have sought to engage in good faith with religious communities and who have brought the amendments to this place today. It has been a pleasure to speak on the bill, and I wish it a speedy passage.

**Daniela DE MARTINO** (Monbulk) (16:10): It is no surprise to say that I am a proud Victorian. I am not ashamed to declare that I am very parochial about this state. The love that I feel for it is real. I have lived in and travelled to other places, other states and other countries, and every time I have returned to Victoria I have felt real deep pride that this is my home and this is where I come from. What I have been most proud of has been the incredible diversity amongst our people. We are home to people from almost every nation. We practise almost all faiths, and we speak over 300 languages. We are a society where people living with disability are respected and supported, where members of the LGBTQIA+ community are free to love who they love. It is a society I have long been proud of because for as long as I can remember by and large it has been a place where people have been able and have had the right to live in relative peace and harmony. I have spoken in this place before about diversity, about equality, about inclusion and about how proud I am of our government and how we promote that at every single turn. In everything we do we have that in our heart to ensure that Victorians are equal and that they can enjoy their lives in relative peace.

However, there has been a rising problem, which we have all acknowledged in this place thus far when speaking on this bill. We have seen it in our electorates or we have seen it on the news or we have experienced it within our own families or our circles of friends: we are seeing a rise in antisemitism and Islamophobia. We are seeing neo-Nazis more frequently out on display, spreading vile messages of hate, recruiting to grow their numbers, bold enough to stand on Elwood Beach and do their exercises, bold enough to hold their gatherings in the Grampians and bold enough to stand on the steps of this place and spread their messages of antisemitism and hate of anything that they think looks mildly different to them. I will not repeat the words that they use. They do not deserve my oxygen.

Vilification is not disagreeing with someone else. Vilification, as per the Racial and Religious Tolerance Act 2001, refers to behaviour that incites or encourages hatred, serious contempt, revulsion or severe ridicule against a person or group based on their race or religion. We are expanding that in this bill, and others have spoken about those expansions to cover disability, our LGBTQIA+ community and gender and sex. It is important that we do this, because we do not want our society to look like the ideal for people like neo-Nazis. It is precisely why we have worked hard as a government. I thank the former Attorney-General for all her work and the current Attorney-General. I thank the Premier. I thank every member of this government who has contributed. I thank everyone in the community who has participated in this to make sure that the legislation before us today, including the two government amendments, is as robust as it can be to ensure that it does the job it needs to do. I thank them all.

I have a friend who works at a Jewish school where last year graffiti was sprayed on the school walls. I spoke to her earlier today. She talked to me about how they worked so hard to remove those words – again I will not repeat the words in here – so that when the buses arrived on Monday morning the children would not have to see those words. Unfortunately word had got out. It had made the news, and the children knew exactly what had been written on the walls of that school. The first thing they had to do was debrief with those kids and check in on them and make sure they were feeling okay, because there is trauma involved. Words – we have spoken about this many times in here; I know I have – have an effect.

Words have a tangible result. The way we use our words, what we say and how we say them affects people very, very deeply. This legislation is here, as the Premier rightly pointed out, to give police the further tools that they need to start stamping this vile behaviour out. I heard actually yesterday that there is a building supply store in Malvern that was founded by Holocaust survivors. It is no longer there – they closed it up a year ago – but the signage is still there indicating it was a Jewish family's building. Again, we have seen horrific words sprayed on there.

The Premier spoke in here before. I listened intently to her words. It was wonderful to be able to hear her speak about this with passion. She said that we were prepared to make amendments originally. We have gone ahead and done that. We have put in two amendments. The first one, which is removing the protection for political defence, was the key concern of those opposite. I ask you: where are they? Because they are not in here. Where are they to speak on this now that we have put in this amendment? Where are they to actually turn up and say, 'Wow, okay. We've asked for this. It's now been given to us. We will now speak to this'? That is the good-faith part I am a little bit concerned about, that they are not in this room right now.

Today's *Age* article states that:

The amendments address the main concerns from the Jewish Community Council of Victoria, Zionism Victoria, the Zionist Federation of Australia and the Executive Council of Australian Jewry, set out in a joint letter to state MPs two weeks ago.

Zionist Federation president Jeremy Leibler on Tuesday –

today –

urged parliamentarians to support the amended legislation. "This bill will do important work," he said.

Zionism Victoria president Elyse Schachna said the proposed laws would "send a message that extreme hate has no place in our community."

This is important to them. It is important to all of us. It is important that we continue to do everything we can in our power to ensure that our state is one where you can be different, where you can practise whichever faith you want to practise – or none at all if that may be the case – where you can speak whichever language, you can wear whatever headdress you prefer or that your religion may require of you and where you can love who you want to love and it should not mean that you are subject to hate. This legislation is critical legislation, and it is beyond upsetting and disappointing to see the response from the coalition.

I am getting a bit emotional about this, as my beautiful colleague the member for Mulgrave was, because I too remember being told to go back where I came from as a child. I do not hear that now because, you know, we are pretty used to Italians in our society. You can thank us all for your beautiful cafe lattes and your cappuccinos and the amazing food that we have and the culture that we brought as well. But there was a time when 'Dagos go home' was the headline of the *Herald Sun*, and my family remember it. There was a time when we were called wog and it was not done with any kind of affection or any kind of jocularly: it was nasty, it was mean, it was intended to hurt. So I know how that feels.

I have spoken about this before and I apologise for my repetition, but this is really important legislation. I was having a look at *Hansard* from last sitting week and I looked at the member for Box Hill's

contribution, and I know how important this is to him. I know how important it is to the member for Thomastown, who spoke earlier today in her members statement about Islamophobia there. All of us are touched by this one way or another. None of us are immune to seeing the terrible effects which vilification has on our society. It is not a place I want us to become, and that is why this is the legislation for our times.

The member for Mordialloc stated, ‘Think of the consequences of inaction’. To stand by and to do nothing would be the worst thing we can do. So once again I ask: where is the opposition? Where are they now that we have moved these two critical amendments, which have been spoken of? I am sorry I have not gone into great detail on both of them, but they are to remove the political purpose defence to the criminal incitement offence and to add proselytising and preaching to the civil religious purpose exceptions, two really important amendments. We went out; we consulted. It took time for this legislation to come here because it is complex to do what we are attempting to do. But I think we have one of the best examples of it, and I am really proud to commend this to the house.

**Kathleen MATTHEWS-WARD** (Broadmeadows) (16:20): I rise to support the Justice Legislation Amendment (Anti-vilification and Social Cohesion) Bill 2024. I am so proud to live in and represent one of the most multicultural and multifaith electorates. We boast over 150 languages and more than 50 different faiths, where you can be at a school graduation and hear both the haka and the zaghārīt, which is the ‘le le le le’ as students’ achievements are celebrated. People travel the world to learn about other cultures and lifestyles. We do not even need to travel; we have incredible richness here, along with a great sense of generosity and pride, and I feel so lucky every day.

I am so fortunate to be invited to so many celebrations. Where else in the world would you attend a footy club, a gurdwara, a lunar celebration, an imam graduation, an RSL, a temple and a dinner with a bishop all in one weekend? And of course it is not just the food and the dancing but the different perspectives, the different ways of contributing and the different value sets that we learn from.

I met some Pasifika elders the other day, and I love their fundamental value in the collective, where the community is more important than the individual, where they look out for everyone, help each other in times of trouble and make sure no-one feels alone. There is the Nepalese care and reverence for elders in their community with their Dashain festival, where the oldest member of each family bestows blessings on everyone, including me. There is the Indian community, who so highly value education and learning that if you drop a book on the floor you touch it on your head as a mark of respect. There is the Muslim community, with its profound commitment to faith and compassion and the spirit of charity and selflessness, zakat and sadaqah, ingrained in Islam. I am proud of my Catholic tradition. It is a big part of who I am, and the social justice values of Catholicism and Christianity drive me every day to work to make the world a better and fairer place. Compassion and care for others, particularly those suffering disadvantage and marginalisation, were not just modelled at home but also drummed into us at school and church every Sunday.

This sense of care and compassion is at the core of nearly every religion. I love the poster describing the golden rule, a principal to treat others the way they would like to be treated. A few of the verses in the religious texts are as follows. In Christianity: do unto others what you want them to do unto you. Judaism: that which is hateful to you, do not do to your fellow. That is the whole Torah; the rest is commentary. Buddhism: do not hurt others in a way you yourself would find hurtful. Hinduism: this is the sum of duty; do nothing to others that would cause you pain if done to you. Islam: none of you believes until he wishes for his brother what he wishes for himself. And Sikhism: I am a stranger to no-one, and no-one is a stranger to me; indeed I am a friend to all. Over a dozen different traditions are included in the poster, even the Wiccans, which would please the member for Monbulk, which has the highest Wiccan population in the state.

With all the violence in the world right now and throughout history I often wish the rest of the world could look at Broadmeadows and see how people from different backgrounds and faiths can live together side by side in harmony and with respect and acceptance. I have boasted so many times that

Victoria is the best multicultural and multifaith state in the world, but recently that harmony all over Victoria is being tested, and it breaks my heart that many in my electorate no longer feel safe. My Muslim friends do not want their daughters catching public transport for fear that they will be spat on, as has happened to them in the past. We only have to look at what happened in Epping to see that this problem is real. It has been real for a long time, but it is getting worse. We made so much progress after 9/11, but it now feels worse than ever. It also breaks my heart that many of my Jewish friends feel unsafe here in Melbourne and that their kids are scared to go to school and that some people think it is okay to do the Nazi salute in public here.

Christians have also felt marginalised, maligned and mocked. Sikhs and Hindus have also suffered vilification, and there have been attacks on temples as well as churches in Broadmeadows.

We in the Labor Party value our faith communities, and the Labor Party has worked so hard to build an Australia where we are free to practise our faiths, pass on our cultures and celebrate our traditions. So many in my community know just how precious and tenuous this freedom is, particularly the many refugees who have escaped countries where they have been persecuted and killed because of their faith, disability or sexuality. They know how stridently we need to protect our freedoms.

People with a disability too have felt maligned and marginalised for years and have been victims of horrendous crimes. You just need to look at the statistics to see their gross over-representation as victims of sexual assault, violence and exploitation. Just look at that taxidriver and how horrendously he treated so many vulnerable people – it is an absolute disgrace. I have even had parents of people with disabilities afraid to return to their country of origin because people with disabilities there are abducted and used for organ harvesting.

We need to do everything we can to protect our community and our freedoms. We can only live in a successfully diverse and multicultural state by respecting and celebrating each other's diversity and by ensuring that we all make each other feel safe and valued and that every person is equal and treated as such, and this law will help do that.

To be honest, it breaks my heart that we even need to bring in such laws because some people fail the basics of respect and think it is okay to make others fearful and unsafe. They hide behind freedom of speech, but freedom of speech is not freedom to harm, it is not freedom to hate, it is not freedom to divide. Hate speech is not free speech; it is hurtful, it is divisive, it is anti-democratic and it is un-Australian, and much of it is imported. The far right from overseas are infiltrating Australia. So many people call themselves proudly Australian yet are so easily brainwashed by ideologies imported from overseas, like the anti-trans movement and the Nazi and white supremacist movements. The far right is using people, making them angry and making them feel like victims. People are getting manipulated and used by bad actors who benefit by undermining the very tenets of democracy.

This 'divide and conquer' playbook is as old as time itself. There are even new and made-up things to divide people on, to make them feel angry and that they have missed out. Twenty years ago no-one even knew what generation they belonged to, but now we have got what I think is a pretty hateful, unfair and unnecessary divide between the boomers and the millennials. Bad actors and their bots are using fear and misinformation on a scale we have never seen before, and democracy and harmony are truly under threat.

We saw how well fear and misinformation and harnessing the economic struggle people were facing after the Depression worked in Germany in the lead-up to World War II. It is so easy to whip up fear and anger and direct it to a scapegoat: another. They harness this anger and turn it into blame against someone who is not like them – turn the other into a monster, letting fear harden hearts and letting hate take hold as well as blame. And people do not care about the consequences; they think because they are hurting and because they are angry and scared that they are right and whatever happens is not their fault, it is the fault of the other. As a kid, I could never reconcile how the good people of Germany let millions of innocent people be sent off to the gas chambers just because they were not the same as

them, whether it was because they were Jewish, homosexual or had a disability. But we know that bad things happen when good people do nothing, so we are not doing nothing – unlike the Libs. We are strengthening laws that make hate and vilification a crime, so people are less likely to get used by bad actors who want to see an end to democracies, who want corporations to rule the world instead of letting governments govern. We have always been stronger together, and these bad actors know this. They will use anything to divide us – race, religion, gender, even age – to create a sense of injustice between people, to blame each other.

We are better than this. We have one of the strongest democracies in the world. We have got enough generosity in our hearts. Our respect for diversity is so precious and it protects each and every one of us and our freedoms to be who we are and to celebrate each other, whether we are Christian, Jewish or Muslim, black or white, rich or poor, young or old, whether we have a PhD or we left school at 12, whether we are able-bodied or have a disability, whether we are gay or straight, male or female or gender-diverse. We are all human and we all deserve respect and dignity and to be treated equally and, most importantly, to feel safe, and this bill does just that.

It is wonderful that this government supports great festivals and events that celebrate each culture, and I think that is pretty key to what makes Melbourne and Victoria one of the best multicultural and multifaith states in the world.

We also need more multicultural and multifaith dialogue where we bring people together with different life experiences, where we listen to each other's stories and learn from each other. I want to give a shout-out to the Merri-bek and Hume interfaith councils and thank them for the important work they do in bringing people together for open and honest dialogue and learning from each other. The open mosque days that many of us attended on the weekend offered us another opportunity to ask questions and deepen our understanding and respect for each other. I particularly thank the Islamic Community Millî Gorus mosque and the Fawkner Masjid for welcoming us so warmly. It is through listening to stories of each other that we truly learn and understand each other; sharing cultures, faiths and traditions is the only way to counter increasing discrimination. It costs nothing to be kind – choose kindness. I commend the bill to the house.

**Meng Heang TAK** (Clarinda) (16:30): I am proud to rise today to make a contribution on the Justice Legislation Amendment (Anti-vilification and Social Cohesion) Bill 2024, and I am even more honoured to follow the contributions of the member for Broadmeadows and also my good friend the member for Mulgrave and her contribution about her own traumatic experience. We are a state that celebrates diversity, and your history and your contribution is shared amongst us all. I am proud to be part of a government that recognises that whatever and whoever you are, whatever you believe in and wherever you are from, you deserve to be safe in our state and free from hate. I must admit that I am four days after cataract surgery, so the line between my eyes is actually blurred. But I will try my very best with this very important bill.

Our diversity is one of our great strengths here in Victoria. We come from hundreds of different backgrounds and from all walks of life. As part of that story, I remember my own citizenship ceremony back in 1998. It was such a proud moment for me, and of course my family were very grateful to become citizens of this great country. At the time I did not know much apart from that I somehow got a piece of paper to say I am an Australian citizen, a country that values democracy, human rights, diversity and freedom. Today every time I attend, celebrate and also welcome our new citizens, of course many times with my good friend the member for Mulgrave, it is such a good feeling – it is an understatement to say that it is a good feeling. I worked at a migration legal service. I ran my own practice for hundreds and hundreds of cases and welcomed families who were reunited with their loved ones. Some escaped refugee camps, some waited for a long time to be reunited with family and some came to Australia through skilled migration and call this place home – what else can we call this place where we welcome our migrant community, where we already have the skills shortage in other states.

We treasure and celebrate our diversity. In fact our diversity is essential to the success and vibrancy of our state. Today with this bill we have another opportunity to reflect on the amazing contributions and the amazing stories of many different Victorians and communities and to celebrate our diversity and what makes each of us unique and what makes us one community. These contributions are significant, in terms of not just our culture and tradition but the vital everyday contributions to the community in academia, business, industry, skills and the like. We are so lucky that Victoria is such a vibrant and wonderful place, and we are thankful for all of these contributions and experiences which enrich our state. The Premier in her contribution earlier made it very clear – and I was fortunate to listen to her contribution intensely in the hot seat at the time – that we have Victorians and their loved ones who are afraid to be who we are without being targeted with shame, ridicule or hate. It was such a very strong contribution.

That is completely unacceptable to me as a representative and as a local member, and it is unacceptable to my community, because everyone deserves to be safe in our state and free of hate. All of us here have a responsibility to Victorians to call out hateful behaviour.

I would like to take this opportunity to share my recent experience after I put out my Facebook post about the Pride March. Fortunately many of the comments on my Facebook post turned out to be not from our local residents; they came from somewhere else. There was call-out in the commentary to say, ‘Go back to where you came from.’ It is such a daunting commentary, but luckily we know that these comments are not coming from our local community. That is what we are doing this today: to defend our community and to celebrate our multicultural, multifaith community.

There are several reforms here that go back to the recommendations of the 2021 Victorian parliamentary inquiry into anti-vilification protections. I was proud to be a member of that inquiry, sitting on the Legal and Social Issues Committee, and I am here with the chair of that committee. It was a powerful experience, hearing from the community about their experience of vilification and the impacts that hate and vilification have on people, particularly on mental and physical health, on participation in public life and more broadly. We heard from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, African Australians, the Muslim community, the Jewish community, many multicultural communities, the LGBTQ+ community, women and disability advocates. I would like to thank everyone who gave evidence for their contributions to the inquiry. It must have taken a lot of courage and conviction. The legislation that we have here in front of us today is testament to that courage and bravery.

As well as the committee recommendations, the bill delivers on the government’s 2022 election commitment to strengthen the Racial and Religious Tolerance Act 2001 to make it easier to prosecute an individual who incites hatred and bigotry based on a person’s faith or skin colour and the government’s public commitment in May 2023 to introduce anti-vilification reform within 18 months. This was a very important commitment to my constituents in the Clarinda district. Our district is one of the most multicultural in the state and is home to a great variety of different faiths. We welcome the commitment and these changes to the Racial and Religious Tolerance Act.

In terms of specific changes to the Racial and Religious Tolerance Act, we are moving criminal anti-vilification law into the Crimes Act 1958 and civil anti-vilification law to the Equal Opportunity Act 2010 and retaining the key features of the RRTA, including protection from racial and religious vilification. There were a lot of important consultations with community leaders, and we acknowledge and appreciate the concern expressed by many that one provision could have been misused or could have potentially legitimised vilifications under the guise of political communication. The Premier said this very clearly in her contribution earlier on.

These are important changes that make it simply fair for all. I would like to conclude with fairness. It is something that we value as Australians and in particular as Victorians. It is something that we value so highly in my electorate and across the south-east of Melbourne, and the same goes for social cohesion. It is something that is extremely important to my community and something that is very

valuable to all. It is something that we want to safeguard and promote and celebrate. That is what this bill is all about. I commend the bill to the house.

**Ella GEORGE (Lara)** (16:40): I rise today to speak on the Justice Legislation Amendment (Anti-vilification and Social Cohesion) Bill 2024. I speak in support of this bill and the amendments introduced today by the government. I would like to acknowledge both the former Attorney-General and the current Attorney-General and their respective teams for the tremendous work that they have done on this bill. I also acknowledge that this bill would not be before the Parliament were it not for the contributions of many individuals, organisations and communities from across Victoria. I thank them for their contributions and feedback throughout the process of bringing this bill before the house and in recent days for their feedback, which has shaped the amendments introduced by the government today.

I find it heartbreaking that we need a piece of legislation such as the one we are debating today, because we know and everyone in this place knows that vilification has no place in our community and for most Victorians it does not align with our values or the behaviours that we expect to see in the multicultural, multifaith state that we are so proud of. But unfortunately this is not the case in our Victorian community right now. Recently we have seen an increase in reports of hate speech and conduct in the community. Before I go into my broader thoughts on this legislation I would like to touch on a recent event in the Geelong community that I think speaks of the urgency of this legislation and why it is needed in our community now.

I was appalled to hear of an incident that occurred in the community I represent, an incident that sent shockwaves through Geelong. A picture was shared on social media which is reported to have been taken at a local venue before a soccer match between two local clubs. The image depicted a group who all had digital images placed over their faces performing a Nazi salute. There is no suggestion that this group were players or members of either club, and both clubs who played that night have rightly come out to condemn this behaviour. I do not want to spend too much time on this because I do not want to give this cowardly and disgusting act too much attention, but this behaviour must be called out, because this behaviour is abhorrent. There is no place for this at sporting events or anywhere else in our community, and no-one should stand for cowardly and intimidating behaviour like this. It is shocking that in 2025 in our multicultural, multifaith community there are individuals who think it is okay to perform an act like this. That is why this bill today is important and why we as a government are taking strong action.

At its heart this bill before us is about social cohesion. It is about building a stronger and more inclusive state, something that we on this side are committed to doing and I hope others in this place are too. Along with legislation like what we have before us that offers protections to all Victorians, there are many other ways in which we can commit to social cohesion and inclusivity. One of the best examples of this I can think of is the annual mosque open day event held last weekend, when mosques around the state opened their doors to the Victorian community. I was honoured to attend the Geelong Mosque with my friend the member for Geelong and to be hosted there by the Islamic Society of Geelong. I left the mosque feeling like I had spent an afternoon with good friends who had taught me even more about their faith and the traditions. In fact that is how I feel after any event with our multicultural and multifaith community in Geelong. I am always blown away by the generosity of people who are so pleased to share their cultures, histories, traditions and faith with people from other backgrounds, and I am really proud that this state government supports Victoria's multicultural and multifaith communities to thrive and to share their cultures with others.

As parliamentarians we all have a role to play when it comes to building social cohesion. I know that many of my colleagues attended mosque open day events in their communities last weekend, and I encourage anyone who is yet to attend a mosque open day to try and get along next year. It truly is a beautiful day in the community and something that is so important when it comes to understanding one another and building that social cohesion that is at the heart of this bill.



Like other critical pieces of legislation, this bill came from a parliamentary inquiry. The 2021 Victorian parliamentary inquiry into anti-vilification protections examined the Racial and Religious Tolerance Act 2001 – and can I acknowledge the Minister for Small Business and Employment, who was then chair of the Legal and Social Issues Committee, which conducted this inquiry.

This inquiry highlighted that vilification affects many Victorians, including First Nations, Muslim and Jewish communities; women; LGBTIQ+ people; and people with disabilities, and it is often experienced online. It reported that despite existing protections, prejudice and hate remain prevalent in Victoria and that current laws are not as effective and accessible as required. Recommendations from the inquiry included extending anti-vilification laws to protect more groups and improving their enforcement. Since then our government has implemented the initial recommendations by banning Nazi symbols and the salute. Today's bill addresses a further 15 legislative recommendations from the inquiry, aimed at strengthening anti-vilification laws and improving their effectiveness, particularly in serious cases. These reforms form part of a broader set of measures against increasing vilification and hate crimes, which include prevention strategies alongside legal reforms.

The reforms in this bill have been developed to carefully balance rights, including the right to freedom of expression, equality and freedom of religion and belief. The freedom to engage in robust discussion reasonably and in good faith is an important pillar of an open and democratic society, and these laws are not intended to prohibit this. This bill promotes equal participation in public life for all. It promotes the right to equality and the freedom to live without vilification while also upholding the right to freedom of religion and belief, because we know that every person has the right to freedom of thought, conscience, religion and belief and to demonstrate that religion or belief in worship, observance, practice and teaching.

The religious protections under existing anti-vilification laws will be retained and strengthened by improving how the law operates. The bill repeals the Racial and Religious Tolerance Act 2001, moving serious vilification offences to the Crimes Act 1958. It provides for the continued protection against vilification based on race, ancestry, nationality, ethnicity and religion. The bill provides enhancements to serious vilification offences and civil anti-vilification protections, including online conduct. It will offer retention and amendment of civil exceptions to vilifications to balance charter rights and legitimate activities. The bill maintains current terminology to only include seriously hateful, contemptuous or violent speech and conduct.

Anti-vilification protections will be expanded to include disability, sex, sex characteristics, sexual orientation, gender identity and personal associations. Complaints can be made based on one or more protected attributes, acknowledging intersectional experiences of hate speech. The bill introduces new serious vilification offences targeting expanded protected attributes, allowing prosecution for inciting hatred or threats. There will be an increase in maximum penalties, ensuring they are raised to reflect the seriousness of these offences, with incitement offences carrying up to three years imprisonment and threat offences up to five years imprisonment.

I do want to touch briefly on the amendments introduced today by the government. These amendments reflect the government's commitment to engaging with the Victorian community on the issues that this bill covers, and the amendments reflect the government's willingness to work with community to ensure that we get this legislation right, because it is far too important to get it wrong. As I mentioned earlier, promoting social cohesion is at the heart of this bill. As the member for Clarinda mentioned, it is also about fairness, fairness for everyone, because fairness does not include vilification. It should absolutely be against the law to vilify anyone, whether that is for their race, their religion, being a woman or being in a wheelchair. Unfortunately there are Victorians and their families who experience this and live in fear of vilification. Sadly there are members of my community in the Lara electorate who also do experience this and have told me about how they have experienced racism. They experience fear of expressing their true selves and facing the possibility of shame, mockery or hostility. It is our duty to support them and support all Victorians by denouncing these hateful actions.

This bill goes one step further and makes it clear that especially in the toughest of times we stand by all Victorians. As parliamentarians we are leaders, leaders in our communities and in our state, and as leaders it is so important to speak up when we see vilification, hate speech and hateful conduct in our communities. We cannot let it go by and not call it out for what it is. With this bill that is exactly what we will do. On this side of the house we are doing that. We are speaking up. We are saying there is no place in our society for vilification. I commend this bill. I wish it a speedy passage through the house, and I urge those opposite to support this bill.

**Anthony CIANFLONE** (Pascoe Vale) (16:50): I too rise to speak on and in support of the Justice Legislation Amendment (Anti-vilification and Social Cohesion) Bill 2024, and I speak on this bill of course as the state member for Pascoe Vale, Coburg and Brunswick West, which is one of the most culturally and ethnically diverse communities in the country, but also as someone who is the proud son of migrant parents who, like so many, came to this country to build a better life following the end of World War II, away from what was at the time Nazi war-ravaged Europe and a war that left Italy, and in particular southern Italy, Calabria and Sicilia, decimated, which was the tragic product and the end result of where hate, fear and prejudice can lead individuals, communities and entire nations if left unchecked and ignored.

That is why it forever will remain incumbent upon all of us as members of Parliament and leaders of our respective local communities to continue saying and doing all that we can to build a better and fairer community for all, to support welcoming and inclusive suburbs for all, whether First Nations people, previous generations of migrant communities or newly arrived migrants. We must continue to always foster and promote social cohesion, peace and harmony by working to bring people together on the things that unite us, not the things that divide us. This is an approach that has long underpinned our story as a successful, vibrant and evolving multiculturally diverse state that has continued to welcome people from all backgrounds, regardless of their race or skin colour, culture, faith, religion, disability, gender, sexual orientation or any other aspect of one's background. No matter what your background is, everyone here in Victoria belongs. With at least 52 per cent of Victorians having at least one parent that was born overseas and Victorians coming from 200-plus countries, speaking 260 languages and following 135 faiths, working to maintain, sustain and strengthen our state's social diversity and cohesion must continue to remain an ongoing priority for any state government, and it should never be taken for granted.

As Dr Martin Luther King once said:

I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the colour of their skin but by the content of their character.

However, while here in Victoria we have of course made tremendous strides over many years in building a more diverse, inclusive and resilient community, the reality is, as we have seen over recent times, sadly, we have more to do. With an increasing number of Victorians having disgracefully and unacceptably been targeted with hatred, fear, shame, violence and ridicule based on their race, faith, culture, skin colour and background, we cannot stand idly by and do nothing, like the Liberals and the National Party are suggesting that we do. Whether it is blatant antisemitism, Islamophobia, racism, homophobia or any other form of overt vilification through words or deeds that incites hate, these actions have absolutely no place in modern-day Victoria in 2025. That is why we have been working to protect and support our state's social cohesion by always, above all else, seeking to promote peace, harmony, understanding and respect through our words and deeds when it comes to fostering social cohesion.

In 2022 of course the Legislative Council Legal and Social Issues Committee conducted an inquiry into extremism. In 2021 the parliamentary inquiry into anti-vilification protections made a number of recommendations that we have continued to support and implement. I want to commend the chair of that committee at the time, the member for St Albans, for her outstanding work and advocacy. As the first Islamic woman elected to this chamber, her leadership stands the test of time in this space, particularly through previous reforms and these reforms today that we are pursuing off the back of that

work. Through that work we banned the Nazi symbol in 2022. We banned the Nazi salute and other gestures and symbols in 2023. In 2024, last year, in November, we launched the first anti-racism strategy in the country to prevent discrimination. We previously introduced the Racial and Religious Tolerance Act 2001 under the Bracks and Brumby governments, we moved the Gender Equality Act 2020, we supported the Multicultural Victoria Act 2011 and we delivered the Advancing the Treaty Process with Aboriginal Victorians Act 2018, and of course we continue to invest in and support all of our multicultural and diverse communities. We continue to invest via our equality portfolio in supporting our lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, queer, intersex, same-sex – LGBTIQ+ – communities of course, and we continue to work and support our incredible disability communities from the cradle right through to age, including through our recent royal commission work over previous years.

But notwithstanding these measures, of course recently we have seen an alarming increase in reports of hate speech and conduct that simply cannot be tolerated or ignored. The 2024 report *Understanding Reporting Barriers and Support Needs for Those Experiencing Racism in Victoria* recorded a 76 per cent increase of people surveyed who stated that they or someone in their care had experienced racism in Australia.

In 2023 the *Victorian Antisemitism Report* recorded that there has been a 228 per cent in antisemitic incidences, including the unacceptable firebombing of the Adass Israel Synagogue established by Holocaust survivors in Ripponlea – totally unacceptable. Since October 2023 the Islamophobia Register Australia has seen an over 600 per cent increase in reported incidents. In 2023 the Victorian Pride Lobby *Fuelling Hate* report recorded hate as escalating, with 49 per cent of the participants surveyed having experienced online abuse, harassment and vilification and 47 per cent saying they had experienced that in person. The Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability of course also sadly heard evidence that people continue to be vilified for their disabilities, and in 2019 the eSafety Commissioner reported that around 14 per cent of Australian adults were estimated to have been the target of online hate speech in the previous year, with LGBTIQ+ communities and First Nations people experiencing online hate at more than double the national average.

In addition to these statewide incidents, we have also sadly seen a number of incidents across my community of Merri-bek that have also sought to sow the seeds of hate and division, sadly. Just last week for example the Greens and socialist Merri-bek councillors voted against a motion for the Merri-bek council to fly the international flag of peace at the Coburg Town Hall. They literally voted against peace. Now we have the Greens in this chamber indicating they will be opposing this bill. It is absolutely shameful that the Greens stand on the side of hate and division and not the side of peace that we seek to. We have seen the Greens and socialist influenced protests regularly and unacceptably target my federal colleague, my good friend Peter Khalil and his office, his staff, his community materials and his billboards, creating regular disruptions for local traders along Sydney Road, including vandalism of his office. That is why, notwithstanding our efforts to date, we need to continue doing more. By introducing this new anti-vilification bill we can better protect all Victorians from vilification, hate and harm.

We need to promote peace and we need to support social cohesion, and this bill will deliver a tranche of reforms to expand and strengthen Victoria's anti-vilification laws to better protect all Victorians. This includes the implementation of 15 of the recommendations from the 2021 parliamentary inquiry. The bill will expand anti-vilification protections from race and religion to also protect the attributes of disability, including physical disability, mental illness, AIDS status and more – gender identity, sex, sex characteristics, sexual orientation and personal association with a person who has a protective attribute. The bill proposes to create two new offences of incitement on the grounds of a protected attribute. This refers to conduct that is objectively likely to incite hatred, serious contempt for, revulsion towards or severe ridicule of a group of people or persons on the grounds of their protected attributes. The offences intend to capture extreme and serious public-facing conduct and are not

intended to capture merely offensive or unkind conduct. The new offence is punishable by three years of imprisonment. A new threat offence will be established – an offence for threats that threaten physical harm or property damage on the grounds of a protected attribute will also be created. The new offence is designed to largely target the worst and most extreme of those threatening and public-facing behaviours that seek to vilify and physically harm people. The offence is punishable by up to five years imprisonment.

The bill also introduces a new definition for ‘public conduct’ which will apply to only public-facing conduct that seeks to spread hate, vilify or threaten. It includes any form of communication via public speaking, writing, displaying notices, playing recorded materials, broadcasting and communicating through social media and other electronic methods, actions and gestures and the wearing, displaying of clothing, signs, flags, emblems and insignia observable by the public. It also reforms the Bail Act 1977 so that the bail decision-makers can remand a person who is charged with intentionally performing a Nazi gesture, as is already the case for the offence of displaying a Nazi symbol. The Liberals claim to be in favour of stronger bail laws, but here is a bill that actually strengthens bail laws that they are opposing.

Along with these measures, the bill also makes provisions for a number of exceptions and defences that appropriately balance the charter of human rights and general rights to freedom of expression, including the usual exceptions for broad civil conduct, artistic, academic, public interest, religious or scientific purposes. The amendment to the bill that was introduced today now adds proselytising and preaching to the civil religious purpose exceptions. The bill provides that only Victoria Police and the Director of Public Prosecutions will be able to commence prosecutions to ensure the appropriate levels of prosecutorial oversight. These two anti-vilification reforms are proposed to commence over two stages, with the criminal reforms from September 2025 and civil reforms by September 2027 or earlier by proclamation.

Finally, the bill imposes a statutory review of the reforms to occur no later than five years after the commencement of all the reforms, with a report tabled in Parliament. That gives the opportunity – it does not stop the Liberals or the Greens from supporting the bill now, as there will be an opportunity embedded into the bill to review these laws and make them better over the coming years. As we have indicated from the outset, we are keen to listen and to work with people in this chamber and the broader community to make those necessary changes to the bill in order to get it passed and to keep people safe now. It is on that basis that I commend the bill to the house. I commend the former Attorney-General for visiting my community to meet with my community members and discuss this bill.

**Katie HALL** (Footscray) (17:00): I am pleased to rise to make a contribution on the Justice Legislation Amendment (Anti-vilification and Social Cohesion) Bill 2024. I do so with the important responsibility that comes from representing a community that has one of the most ethnically diverse populations in Victoria, where 40 per cent of residents were born outside of Australia, residents come from more than 135 different countries and they speak more than 80 languages.

When I was thinking about the contribution I want to make today I reflected on the advocacy of William Cooper, who was an Aboriginal man in my community of Footscray. Despite the vilification he himself experienced and that his community experienced, in 1938 he was the only person in the world at the time to lead a protest against Kristallnacht. He marched from his humble house in Southampton Street in Footscray to the German consulate in the city to speak out in defiance of the antisemitism that the Jewish people of Germany were experiencing.

When I was studying at university I was fortunate enough to participate in a course at Monash University, the Holocaust history program, where I was fortunate to spend a great deal of time at the Melbourne Holocaust Museum in Elsternwick and to speak with and learn from survivors. Writing my contribution today, I could not help but reflect on the quote that is at the Holocaust museum in Washington, which is the famous Martin Niemöller quote:

First they came for the socialists, and I did not speak out –

because I was not a socialist.

Then they came to the trade unionists, and I did not speak out –

because I was not a trade unionist.

Then they came for the Jews, and I did not speak out –

because I was not a Jew.

Then they came for me – and there was no one left to speak for me.

I think about that because I think in the context of this bill – this very important bill – passivity is not an option. To sit there and do nothing, to say nothing, is not an option, because our democracy is so precious and our multiculturalism, our multifaith community, the respect we have for one another and the society that we have built on mutual respect and understanding are so precious. But vilification is sadly experienced by too many Victorians, and this bill responds to the recommendations made after the 2021 inquiry into anti-vilification protections, which made clear that the current laws were inadequate. I am so proud to represent a diverse and vibrant electorate. People of all walks of life call Footscray home, and it is our greatest attribute.

This bill repeals the Racial and Religious Tolerance Act 2001, moving serious offences to the Crimes Act 1958 and civil matters to the Equal Opportunity Act 2010. The first recommendation made by the 2021 report, and one of the most important, was to expand protections beyond race and religion, and the new protections will also cover sexual orientation, gender identity, sex characteristics, disability, HIV or AIDS status and personal association with a person or a group with a protected attribute.

The bill introduces two new vilification offences into the Crimes Act 1958: an incitement offence and a threat offence.

The incitement offence applies to conduct that is objectively likely to incite hatred against, serious contempt for, revulsion towards or severe ridicule of another person or a group of persons on the grounds of a protected attribute. The offence is intended only to be used against extremely serious conduct. Simply being unkind or making disparaging remarks, as unpleasant as that is, will not land you in jail under these reforms. The bill makes careful consideration not to limit the constitutional implied freedom of political communication. This includes communication about government or political matters so that people, including MPs and the broader Victorian community, can express opinions and criticisms about government policy and decisions. It is important that we acknowledge the difference between expressing an opinion and inciting hatred. I would think it is obvious where this line is, as there is never a reason to express vitriol towards someone for their race, sexuality, faith or any of the other protected attributes introduced by this bill.

The threat offence is where a person threatens physical harm towards a person, group or the property of a person or group on the grounds of a protected attribute. The political communication defence does not apply to the threat offence as there is no circumstance in which violence or threats of violence can have a genuine political purpose. We have all been shocked this week when reading the news that the police are investigating alleged Islamophobic attacks on women at a shopping centre in suburban Melbourne. It is completely unacceptable.

The online offences component of this bill is really important. As the member for Broadmeadows indicated, there are bad actors who are amplifying some of this hate speech. In an age of artificial intelligence this threat is very, very serious and of deep concern to our democracy and our society. During consultation and throughout the inquiry we heard that online vilification is one of the most pervasive and harmful forms of vilification. It is particularly damaging because of its anonymity and its ability to spread quickly to large audiences. As members of Parliament we all cop some pretty horrendous abuse online, and I am sure no-one would disagree that hiding behind a keyboard should not absolve you of criminal responsibility for gutless attacks on people that are different to you. Again, it should be noted that these offences do not apply to disparaging or unkind remarks but to those with the intent to incite serious hatred and contempt.

When I think about the Victoria that I love, where so many people pursue their lives, a place with democracy and freedom, I think about the Vietnamese community in my electorate of Footscray. Just this weekend the Premier joined me and other colleagues at the Tet Festival in Footscray Park. It was particularly special this year because it marked 50 years since Vietnamese refugees first arrived in Melbourne's inner west at the Maribyrnong hostel, coming off boats – many thousands of them died making that terribly perilous journey to Australia – including our most recent mayor of the City of Maribyrnong Cr Cuc Lam, who arrived on a boat with just a suitcase. The Vietnamese community were wearing T-shirts that said 'Thank you, Australia', and they have raised half a million dollars towards the Footscray Hospital project. How poorer we would be if that community had not sought to call Victoria home. This bill is so important. I am so disappointed in the opposition and in the Greens for opposing it. I commend the bill to the house.

**Matt FREGON** (Ashwood) (17:10): I rise to make my contribution on the Justice Legislation Amendment (Anti-vilification and Social Cohesion) Bill 2024. As other members have said, it is a shame that this bill is necessary, but we do not live in a perfect world, and we never will live in a perfect world. I think it is fair to say that over the course of my life we have come a long way, but as many have noted, including members on the other side, we have seen a rise in hate speech very publicly and prominently. If for no other reason but that, this bill is necessary to tell all of Victoria that it is not acceptable. If that was all this bill did, that would be a step in the right direction, but it is not all this bill does.

I listened to members on the other side last sitting week, as many in here did. I would not propose that any member of this house would speak in the terms that we are affecting today. I am not a supporter of guilt by association as a criminal offence, and I do not bandy people together, but I do find it unfortunate that in a piece of law which has gone through many stages of preparation, going back to the committee inquiry that was I believe, from memory, last term a bipartisan result between the member for St Albans, the Minister for Youth and Minister for Veterans, and also the member for Caulfield – if I remember correctly, they put together their report in a bipartisan way. We have made good strides since then with the criminalisation of the hakenkreuz and the banning of the salute.

We are still seeing black-pyjama-clad neo-fascist idiots who are out there spreading their hate and inciting others to join them, and this is not acceptable. I listened carefully to members on the other side and their concerns in regard to the 'genuine political purpose' defence, and I was quite content to stand and argue the case of why I did not think that was going to be the end of the world for this bill. I am happy to see that this defence is being removed, that it is not necessary, and I hope that means that members on the other side will vote aye, as I intend to, when it comes to the passing of this bill. I appreciate there are other arguments.

I see that the amendments that have been circulated by the Leader of the House also add the word 'preaching' because that was something that faith-based groups were concerned about. Again, whilst I would potentially argue that may not be necessary, this is about trying to find common ground. I thank the Premier, the Leader of the House and the Attorney-General for making changes to try and find that common ground so we can all stand here together and say, 'This is a good step.' This will not fix racism. I do not think any of us are silly enough to think this will fix racism, but it is necessary for us to draw this line.

I have great respect for the member for Malvern as a former jurist, barrister, lawyer – probably not jurist; although you never know; there is always time, member for Malvern. He did say in his contribution that one of his concerns is that we were – and I am trying not to verbal you, member for Malvern, but one of your concerns was that we are lowering the bar.

**The SPEAKER:** Through the Chair.

**Matt FREGON:** My apologies, Speaker, I should know that. I would argue, to the member for Malvern, that we are raising the bar. We are raising the bar to set the standard of what is discourse that

this state agrees with, and the leftover is what is not tolerable. I do not care which group or minority group, there are plenty that we are trying to include equally in our society. I am a middle-aged white bloke with an Anglo-Franco history –

**John Mullahy** interjected.

**Matt FREGON:** I will take the interjection from the member for Glen Waverley: from the gully. I have not been vilified to my knowledge. The closest I got was probably when I had glasses as a kid. To refer to the interjection again – which I should not do, Speaker, I know, but anyway – I look at when I was growing up in the gully, and slurs to Indigenous people were commonplace in the language in the schoolyard. Homophobic slurs were commonplace in the language of the schoolyard. It was a different time. We do not necessarily judge that time. We do not put the same emphasis on today's arguments, but it was never right. Maybe we have come a little bit further on in this state in the last 40 or 50 years. Maybe we are a little bit better, and part of the reason we might be a little bit better is because of laws like this that our government brings in to say we are raising the bar. As a collective, with all of the millions of people that we represent, we are saying this is the standard. We cannot solve stupid. It would be nice if we could, but we cannot fix the idiots who are on the steps – not now, obviously, thank God, hopefully, but who were. We cannot fix that. There are always going to be people who have views that the collective majority of the state of Victoria thinks are abhorrent. It would be lovely to get rid of them – it would be better to educate them – but they will exist. What we are saying today is that with this bill, when it becomes law, you are accountable.

Mount Scopus is on just the other side of Burwood Highway from my electorate. To see antisemitic graffiti being put up anywhere near my home breaks my heart. Again, when I was a kid, if people were using homophobic slurs, it was acceptable. It was not right, but it was accepted and therefore it was deemed to be acceptable at the time. If I hear my boys saying anything of the like these days, I pick it up straightaway, and I would presume everyone in this chamber would do the same. They are getting taught; they are in a different world. The mini version of Ripon over there is going to grow up in a different world than I did, and that is such a good thing. I grew up in a very white Anglo school in Ferntree Gully, Kent Park Primary – love ya. My children grew up in a different primary school. They will never know, and that is such a good thing. We have so much to be proud of in our multicultural society, and this makes it better.

I will finish with this. Members on the other side shared their concerns about the bill that we have in front of the house. Those who have already spoken cannot speak again; they are the rules of this house. I am not judging them for that; they are the rules. But it is most likely that on Thursday we will get to say aye or nay or maybe nothing. I will be saying aye. I commend the bill to the house.

**Belinda WILSON** (Narre Warren North) (17:20): I spend a lot of time in this chamber, and I found interesting the contributions that I listened to last sitting week from the other side. It is not on every bill that a government goes away and looks at the feedback and makes significant amendments and changes to something that is really important to us and really important to this side of the chamber.

The member for Ashwood is of a similar vintage to me and we were brought up in a different world. I may be a few years older than you, Deputy Speaker, but that is okay. We will not hold anyone to that. You did take my baby lines, so I am very upset with you. As a mum of three kids – I will always call them kids even though they are 23, 21 and 19 – they look at the world and look at racism, antisemitic behaviour and Islamophobia very differently to the way we were brought up and the way we looked at it. 'Enjoyed' is probably not the right word to use, but I have listened to many of the contributions and the majority of them have come from this side of the chamber. These subjects are very hard for me personally because I worked for over 10 years for two Jewish members of parliament, and especially in the last couple of years I have seen the dramatic increase in absolutely unacceptable behaviour. I guess it is just like the member for Ashwood said, about how things are acceptable and then we let them go and we let them go and they get bigger and bigger. I have seen that frequently.

Most people in this chamber, especially on this side of the house, know the federal member Josh Burns as a Jewish member of Parliament for the seat of Macnamara. I had the pleasure of working with him for three years. One of the things that was my job was to carry a bottle of turpentine and a cloth in my car, and every single day I had to go out to a postbox or a sign or a corflute – this was during the campaign – or a big sign and wipe off antisemitic slurs. Every single day. Some mornings he would call me at seven in the morning and say, ‘Can you head out to this place?’ and I would go and do it. Do you know what? Quite honestly, I never thought much of it. I just sort of did it. It is not until the recent behaviour of so many people in this state that I thought, ‘Wow, this undercurrent has been happening for such a long time.’ I think that sometimes I just go, ‘It’s okay. Look at the brighter side of things,’ but I have seen my friends be treated and have to put up with behaviour and hurtfulness that is unacceptable. As many people on this side of the chamber have said, it is pretty appalling that we actually had to bring in legislation in Parliament really. That is what is upsetting. However, here we are. I think what is upsetting and disappointing is that we do not have the support of the other side. That, to me, is really upsetting and disappointing.

The member for Clarinda was talking about citizenship ceremonies, and in my seat of Narre Warren North we have over 600 citizenship ceremonies a month. It is one of my favourite things to do. We are so proud of our multicultural community. To be honest, Victoria and Australia have always been very multicultural. I know that the member for Monbulk was talking about the Italians and the Greeks, and in my family it is the Irish and the English. We have always been a very multicultural state, and we are so proud of that. I am so proud to stand every single day with so many different cultures in this state.

One of my favourite things on the weekend was visiting with the Muslim community at an open mosque day. I have one very large mosque in my community – a shout-out to the incredible people at the Hallam mosque – but I also have two other mosques that are just outside, one being the Turkish mosque, Emir Sultan Mosque. What was so fantastic about going there on Saturday was that they run a Saturday school, and there were all these magnificent kids there. What upset me on that day was that when I was at Hallam mosque upstairs with the ladies having a cup of tea, they started to tell me about the racism that they experience every single day. They stand at traffic lights, and people look them up and down. These women are very educated women. Some of them teach in my local schools, work in the public service, work in incredible jobs, and they say people look at them as though they cannot speak English because they wear a hijab. They expect that they do not know what they are talking about. They talk to their children and not to them because they think they cannot speak English. It was upsetting. I said to them, ‘I am sad that this happens to you.’ And they said, ‘Belinda, it doesn’t happen to us once a week or once a month; it happens daily.’

I look forward to the day when, as a community, we can be kind. I have an award at Christmas time that I give to my grade 6s – I have over 19 grade 6 classes – and it is called the respect and integrity award. I always say when I present that award that the recipient of this award is not the smartest, but they are the person that can be the kindest, and it costs absolutely nothing to be that person, nothing at all.

I know a lot has been said about the Jewish schools and the signage that has been over the schools and the fences and the workplaces. I parked at this place one day with my family, and we crossed the road to go and have lunch at a Chinese restaurant. My dad is nearly 80 and if I said he was elderly he would probably hit me in the face. He is not at all of course, but 80, if you google it, would classify as an elderly person. My mum is 75. As my dad went to step out of the restaurant into the street, the restaurant owner pulled him back and pulled down the shutter and said, ‘Don’t go out there. It’s not safe.’ There were a whole group of people coming up the street, and they were putting antisemitic stickers all up on the street on the restaurant windows. My kids and I walked along and pulled them all off. But the thought of actually having to do that was just frightening for me.

I have also had many conversations with Paul Hamer, the member for Box Hill. He said his wife and children have never been so scared – scared of going to school, scared of going out. I have had friends



say to me that they have never been so scared to socialise in this community. Really? That is frightening. That is not our state. That is not who we are. We are a state of kindness, and we are a state of inclusion. As I have said, I am sad that we have to introduce this bill, but I know it will make a difference, and it is going to be up to each and every one of us to make this change happen. We have no room in this state for hate. We have no room for antisemitic behaviour. We have no room for Islamophobic behaviour. We have no room for Nazis. We have no room for Nazi salutes. We have no room for the swastika. We have respect. I know that the member for Footscray also spoke about the Holocaust Museum, a place I have visited many, many times. I encourage every single Victorian to go and visit there. It is the most moving and incredible place you will ever, ever visit. It is touching. It is moving. I always want my friends, no matter what country they are from – whether it be from Israel, whether it be from Afghanistan, whether it be from Palestine, no matter where they are from – to feel safe in this incredible state. I would like to commend the bill to the house.

**Josh BULL** (Sunbury) (17:30): I rise to make a contribution on what is a very important piece of legislation before the house this afternoon, the Justice Legislation Amendment (Anti-vilification and Social Cohesion) Bill 2024. Before I go to the specifics of what is, as I mentioned, an incredibly important bill for the house, I want to acknowledge the commitment, the determination and the passion of the Premier in bringing this on again in her contribution earlier this afternoon and indeed demonstrating to both the house and all Victorians that hate and vilification are not in any circumstance okay or acceptable within our state.

This stands, sadly and unfortunately, in stark contrast to what we have heard this afternoon from those opposite, whereby we had in this place a scenario where just last sitting week those opposite had expressed concerns by both the Jewish and Muslim communities and other groups about a ‘political purpose’ defence, and that defence now, as all members know, is no longer part of the bill. But what we have again seen – and I say disappointingly and incredibly sadly – from those opposite is of course choosing ideology yet again over people. I have listened intently to many contributions from this side of the house, and these contributions from a number of members that have been made throughout the journey this afternoon have reflected on both personal circumstances and stories of those members and indeed their families and those of constituents and friends and others that have expressed some in many ways heartbreaking stories of personal experiences that had been shared with members. Yet again we see ideology take hold of those opposite, gripped by division, as per usual, and the loser, as always, is of course the Victorian community.

This bill goes to the very heart of what both our community and our state and of course we each and every day as members of this side of the house coming in here should be working towards – creating a fairer, better, more just society and community. We know that all of these hallmarks, all of these characteristics that make up the Victorian community are something that we value but we do indeed need to fight for. These are not a given; it is always about going in and listening to communities but addressing these instances and these issues when they occur.

I have had the opportunity – the great privilege, I should say – of being the Parliamentary Secretary for Multicultural Affairs, co-chairing the anti-racism taskforce in its infancy and indeed learning about working with multicultural communities but also learning about experiences that I have not had, that I took the opportunity to listen and to learn about. In so many instances I have felt a profound sense of sadness and that the experiences that have been shared in those forums and that have been shared by other members in their contributions this afternoon or this evening indeed must go to making sure that we need to work harder every single day to protect those in our community who experience all sorts of hate. Many of those have been canvassed today.

What I will say is there is a fragility to social harmony. Those values that I have spoken about earlier are in stark contrast to the dark, dangerous and destructive forces that exist within our state and within every single local community. Sadly, again, what we are seeing from those opposite is a complete ignoring of that in the choices that they are making.

There are of course those within our community who choose hate. There are those who target people of a certain race, there are those who target people of a certain religion and there are those who target those with a particular disability. There are those who target others because of their sexual orientation, and frankly, there are those who target other people just because they can. In every single instance and in every single way we have an obligation and a responsibility as members of Parliament to come into this place and to fight for those people, and if we do not and we are not, then we may as well hang up the boots and head out the door, because that is the most important thing we can do in this house. When those who spread hate and fear and division – many of the groups or the instances, multiples, a series of behaviours or patterns – are empowered, that is when of course it spreads and it grows. There are countless examples of history, and I have heard so many of those spoken about so passionately in this debate this evening, and of course we all know where that ends up.

Through this bill the government is sending a message in the strongest possible terms that enough is enough. It gives effect to those 15 recommendations that were set out in the report from the Legal and Social Issues Committee into the anti-vilification protections. I want to do as others have done, and that is of course thank all of those members of the committee that participated in that important work. Indeed it has been said in the course of the debate that the work of parliamentary committees is incredibly important, and this is a prime example of that. I want to acknowledge the current Minister for Small Business and Employment, Minister for Youth and Minister for Veterans in particular for chairing that work but extend that of course to all committee members.

The acceptance of those 15 recommendations from the 2021 report and the amendments that have been made today go to what this government stands for. It should not matter what your race, your religion or your background is; every single Victorian deserves to feel safe in their community. Every single Victorian deserves to move about our community, to go to school, to go to work, to live and to enjoy their life free from vilification and hate, and by beefing up and ensuring the relative changes that are contained in this bill that relate to those 15 recommendations from the original report, we of course stand with those who have in so many instances – particularly, as others have mentioned, in recent times – been subject to the cruellest of behaviour. We on this side of the house will continue to work with all of those communities each and every day, right across our portfolios, to ensure that they are supported and of course they are protected.

As others have done, our message to those that want to spread fear and division and divide and harm people is of course that we will throw the book at you, because it is never acceptable. Acting Speaker Mercurio, to behave in that way. The vast majority of people within my community, I am sure in your community and communities right across our great state do the right thing, support one another and want to look after each other. But we know that there are those dark and dangerous elements within the community that we have seen particularly in recent times, with global conflicts and other matters, that have wanted to harm others and make statements of fear and hate, and that is why this legislation is so important. My final message to those opposite is that history is always the best judge of these matters. It is time to get on board, and with those comments I commend the bill to the house.

**Jackson TAYLOR** (Bayswater) (17:40): It is a pleasure to rise and speak in support of the Justice Legislation Amendment (Anti-vilification and Social Cohesion) Bill 2024. At the very outset can I thank everyone who has been involved in this, in particular many members of our community, many Victorians, many stakeholders, as many people have detailed, and I will go into some of that detail of the parliamentary inquiry and the important work that members of the government – members of this place and the other place – have done working with the Victorian community to get this right and to make sure it is a good piece of legislation that will go a significant way, as the member for Sunbury detailed, to making sure people can go about their lives free of hate and free of vilification. That is why it is a great pleasure to rise and speak in support of this legislation.

We know that following those further consultations that occurred after the introduction of the bill into this place, the government is moving two amendments to strengthen the anti-vilification and social cohesion bill. One is to remove the political purpose definition to the criminal incitement offence and

the other is adding proselytising and preaching into the civil religious purpose exceptions. Including the ‘genuine political purpose’ defence to the incitement offence which was intended to ensure consistency with the constitutionally implied freedom of political communication; it was never intended to expand that protection. Government has continued conversations with community leaders. We also fully acknowledge and appreciate the concern expressed by many that the provision could have been misused and potentially legitimise vilification under the guise of political communication. As such, we will remove that provision. Doing so will not affect the operation of the offences. Existing general statutory and common-law defences such as self-defence, duress et cetera will apply to the offences, and that is consistent with the current law.

The bill also strengthens the civil anti-vilification protections with incitement and harm provisions, and existing exceptions are retained. The religious purpose exception had minor amendments to make the language consistent with other legislation protecting worship, observance, practice and teaching. But we heard concerns the revised language could have had the effect of narrowing the exception; that was not our intention. Therefore we will add the words ‘proselytising’ and ‘preaching’ to make that crystal clear. The exception is necessary to balance rights and ensure legitimate activities are not against the law, and the government stands by Victorians who wish to genuinely practise their religion.

This bill will deliver a tranche of reforms to expand and strengthen Victoria’s anti-vilification laws to better protect all Victorians from the serious harms of vilification and hate conduct. As stated previously by other members, it includes implementing 15 of the recommendations of the parliamentary inquiry into anti-vilification protections. The bill will expand the vilification protections from race and religion to also protect the attributes of disability, gender identity, sex, sex characteristics, sexual orientation and personal association with a person who has a protected attribute. It will repeal the Racial and Religious Tolerance Act 2001 and move criminal anti-vilification offences to the Crimes Act 1958 and civil anti-vilification protections to the Equal Opportunity Act 2010. It will improve how serious vilification offences operate, including by introducing new serious vilification offences; improve how civil protections operate, including by modifying the civil incitement-based protection; introduce a new harm-based protection; and retain the civil exceptions with minor amendment. It will retain the key features of the RRTA, including protections from racial and religious vilification. It will also make a technical amendment to the Bail Act 1977 to ensure that bail decision makers can remand a person who is charged with intentionally performing a Nazi gesture. This government listened to our community on this piece of legislation, just as we listened to the community when we recently passed legislation in this term of Parliament to ban Nazi symbols and to ban the Nazi salute, which is absolutely in line with community expectations to do so.

This is ultimately a bill, as the member for Sunbury detailed so eloquently in his contribution, to ensure people can be who they want to be, be free of hate and be free of vilification. I think not just of the entire Victorian community; I think of the community that I am very lucky and privileged to represent. Particularly as we have seen a lot of the vilification directed towards our proud and beautiful multicultural communities across our state, I think of the wonderful multicultural communities I am very privileged to have in my electorate.

I think of the people at the Sri Vakrathunda Vinayagar Temple in The Basin – beautiful, beautiful people and a great temple that I know the member for Glen Waverley has visited a number of times, a number of times with me as well. I think of the wonderful people at the Shree Swaminarayan Temple in Boronia. I think of the wonderful people at the Hindu Satsang Mandal Temple of Victoria, who I just visited recently, and of course one of the reasons we were visiting was as part of the investments we continue to make as part of our commitment to strengthen those communities and invest in infrastructure but also this type of legislation to continue to support those communities.

I also think of the Chinese Association of Victoria, based in Wantirna, a very proud, beautiful community. I have been visiting them since my time, even before Parliament, in local council, and they are wonderful people. I think of the very sad and tragic times we are currently dealing with, but also the sad times we dealt with during the COVID pandemic in those early days with some of the

horrible stuff we saw directed at our Chinese and Asian communities. That absolutely abhorrent behaviour from a small minority of our community is hurtful, it is impactful. We need to continue at every point in time in this place to stand together, to come together as a community, to work with Victorians through all the avenues of inquiry we could possibly have, including parliamentary inquiries, to make sure we call out that behaviour and we codify it into law to say that it is unacceptable.

Parliament's intention through this legislation is very clear. It is saying that that behaviour is entirely unacceptable, and it is criminalising it even further and making sure that we do exactly what people should expect in Victoria, ensuring that they can be who they want to be, live the life they want to live and love who they want to love, and that is nothing short of what every Victorian should expect.

I have been very privileged to be in this place and listen to some of the wonderful contributions from colleagues on this piece of legislation. The member for Mordialloc spoke about thinking of the consequences of inaction and what that would mean and what the stark consequences of doing nothing would be. Sadly, it would appear that some in this place do not want to support this legislation. If that is the case, if you do not want to support this legislation, at the very least get up and explain to the Victorian people, to your communities, why you will not be supporting this legislation if that is indeed the case. The member for Mordialloc articulated that point extremely well, I thought.

I remember listening to the member for Box Hill's speech and hearing about the horrible, horrible acts of antisemitism in his community, hearing about the important work that he has done working with his community, the Jewish community, working within government, particularly as it pertains to this legislation. I am very proud to be a colleague of the member for Box Hill. I sit next to him. He is a lovely chap, and I am very proud of the work that he has been doing and of his contribution on this particular legislation. The member for Albert Park, who is not in this place at the moment, detailed again – and it is really sad to have to say this over and over – the horrible acts of antisemitism in her community, and we are hearing it too often. Enough is enough. I am really proud for those reasons and so many more to speak in support of this legislation. And of course we also had the Premier in here on her feet speaking in support of this legislation, talking about the importance of inclusivity, of social cohesion and a welcoming Victoria that we all know and love for everyone. It was wonderful to see the Premier in here talking on this bill.

I am very lucky that I grew up in one of the most multicultural places not just in Victoria but in the country, in Dandenong. It taught me to never judge someone unless you walk a mile in their shoes. It taught me to love everyone. It taught me to treat everyone with kindness, fairness and equity. I am very proud of my upbringing and I am very proud of the experiences I had as a result of it and all the different people and cultures I have met from right across this world. I will never stop learning and I will never stop listening. I am very proud of this legislation, and I am very proud that Victoria is a proud multicultural society. We have to keep on that tradition, and I commend this bill to the house.

**John MULLAHY** (Glen Waverley) (17:50): I too rise today in favour of the Justice Legislation Amendment (Anti-vilification and Social Cohesion) Bill 2024. This bill represents a significant step forward in our commitment to creating a safer and more inclusive Victoria, and it aims to expand and strengthen our anti-vilification laws, ensuring that all Victorians are better protected from the serious harms of vilification and hate conduct. I would also like to thank the other members from our side for their contributions – the member for Monbulk and the member for Narre Warren North for her excellent contribution there as well. I would also like to thank the former Attorney-General in the other place for the work that she undertook to get this bill to us before this place, and I would like to acknowledge the contribution made by the member for Box Hill last sitting week. He always makes a wonderful contribution when it comes to serious matters like this that are before the house.

The need for this bill is clear and urgent. The 2021 Victorian parliamentary inquiry into anti-vilification protections highlighted the pervasive and harmful impacts of vilification on many Victorians. The inquiry found that existing laws are ineffective and inaccessible, leaving many individuals and communities vulnerable to hate speech and conduct. Recent increases in reports of

hate speech and conduct further underscore the necessity of these reforms. This bill will implement 15 of the legislative recommendations from the inquiry, addressing the gaps in our current laws and extending protections to more Victorians. It is a comprehensive response to the inquiry's findings and a testament to our commitment to fostering social cohesion and protecting the rights of all individuals.

The Justice Legislation Amendment (Anti-vilification and Social Cohesion) Bill introduces several key reforms. It expands anti-vilification protections, and it extends the protections beyond race and religion to include disability, gender identity, sex, sex characteristics, sexual orientation and personal association with a person who has a protected attribute. This expansion is in line with the recommendation 1 of the inquiry and aims to protect the individuals and communities most at risk of vilification. It also repeals the Racial and Religious Tolerance Act 2001 (RRTA), and the criminal anti-vilification offences will be moved to the Crimes Act 1958. Civil anti-vilification protections will be moved to the Equal Opportunity Act 2010.

This bill introduces two new serious vilification offences, an incitement offence and a threat offence. The incitement offence will apply to contact that is objectively likely to incite hatred, serious contempt, revulsion or severe ridicule based on a protected attribute. This offence is punishable by up to three years imprisonment. The threat offence applies to threats of physical harm or property damage based on a protected attribute, and this offence is punishable by up to five years imprisonment. Both offences capture intentional and reckless conduct and apply to both public and private conduct, including online conduct. The bill modifies the civil incitement-based protection and introduces a new harm-based protection, and these protections will continue to apply only to public conduct, including online conduct. The current civil exceptions have been retained, with minor amendments to balance charter rights and ensure legitimate activities are not against the law. This bill retains key features of the RRTA, including protections from racial and religious vilification. This bill makes a minor technical amendment to the Bail Act 1977 to ensure that bail decision-makers can remand a person charged with intentionally performing a Nazi gesture.

We are proud to deliver on the government's commitment to expanding and strengthening Victoria's anti-vilification laws, and this bill will give effect to 15 recommendations. As the inquiry found, vilification is commonplace for many Victorians, and its harmful impacts are real and pervasive.

Recently we have seen an alarming increase in reports of hate speech and conduct. The member for Bayswater just brought up the hatred and vilification that was brought up during the period of the COVID-19 response. I was working for the member for Ashwood at the time, and I remember that it had been unleashed on the Chinese community in our district. We saw signs going up around the neighbourhood. We saw kids being spat on on buses. We saw them being vilified just because the federal Liberal government at the time decided to attack China and the Chinese government without any nuance at all, and unfortunately that unleashed this vilification of the community that I am so proud to represent now. That is why this bill is so important.

In line with recommendation 1 of the inquiry, anti-vilification laws will be expanded beyond race and religious belief or activity to also protect the attributes of disability, including mental illness, HIV or AIDS status; gender identity; sex; sexual orientation or personal associations with a person or group with a protected attribute. This bill only extends the attributes to the extent identified as necessary by the inquiry to protect the individuals and communities most at risk of vilification. The existing definitions under the Equal Opportunity Act 2010 apply to the expanded protected attributes.

Existing general statutory and common-law defences, such as self-defence, duress and defence of mental impairment, apply to the offences. This is consistent with the current law. The incitement offence includes a genuine political purpose defence to ensure the anti-vilification laws, which aim to protect individuals and groups from hatred and discrimination. These laws help to create safer, more inclusive environments by providing legal safeguards and encouraging social harmony. Some of the primary benefits include the prevention of hate crimes. Anti-vilification laws serve to prevent hate

speech and actions that can escalate into violent crimes, protecting individuals from physical harm and emotional trauma. They also provide safety and dignity by criminalising offensive speech and actions that target individuals based on inherent characteristics. These laws promote the safety and dignity of those who might otherwise be subjected to harassment or violence.

It also is for the promotion of equality. Equal treatment, which these laws promote, will ensure that all people, regardless of sex, race, religion, gender identity or disability, have the right to be treated equally and with respect. They help to dismantle systemic discrimination by holding individuals and institutions accountable for harmful behaviour. It also combats discrimination by outlawing vilification. These laws aim to combat the social structures that support discriminatory practices, helping to level the playing field for marginalised groups in areas like employment, education and housing.

It also encourages social cohesion and inclusion, including fostering social harmony, as anti-vilification laws send a strong message that hate speech and discrimination are unacceptable, promoting a more inclusive and harmonious society. They create a social climate where diversity is valued and individuals feel empowered to contribute to society without fear of prejudice or exclusion. It also builds empathy by recognising and addressing the harms caused by vilification. These laws can help to foster greater understanding and empathy between people of different backgrounds and identities, improving community relations.

Many other members of this house have described the vilification they experienced as a young child or the fact that they have not really experienced things of that nature. I just remember back to when I was in primary school, and I remember having a little bit of an Irish accent. I remember going to these schools, and I must have picked up from my parents the thick west of Ireland Mayo and Roscommon brogue that they had. I remember being targeted by other kids in class because I spoke a little bit differently, and although you can laugh those sort of things off, that is the experience that people experience on a daily basis. That is what this bill is about. It is about ensuring that we foster social harmony and that we build empathy. I commend this bill to the house.

**Alison MARCHANT** (Bellarine) (18:00): Can I start by saying from the outset that it is an absolute privilege to be in this place. It comes with great responsibility, and so it is a real privilege to have the opportunity to speak in full support of this bill, the Justice Legislation Amendment (Anti-vilification and Social Cohesion) Bill 2024. This bill is about delivering a tranche of reforms to expand and strengthen our Victorian anti-vilification laws and better protect Victorians from that serious harm of vilification and hate conduct. This bill is the result of a lot of work over many, many years – of hard work and deep commitment to that policy engagement and development that has led to this bill before us that we are now debating.

I would like to start by expressing my heartfelt gratitude to those community organisations, individuals, faith-based groups and Victorians who shared their lived experience. They contributed to the development of this bill through the 2021 Victorian parliamentary inquiry into anti-vilification protections. It was heart-wrenching to read some of the submissions, but vilification, unfortunately, is very commonplace for many Victorians. It has harmful impacts and real consequences, and recently we have been seeing an alarming increase in reports of hate speech and conduct. That inquiry examined the effectiveness of our laws and did explore ways that we can strengthen protections against hate speech and discrimination, and it certainly showed an ugly side of our community. Like I said, we have had growing incidence of vilification and its harmful impacts in our communities. I want to thank the people who gave their brave testimonies. People from affected communities emphasised that emotional, psychological and social toll that vilification has on victims, and marginalised groups and individuals have described how the negative impact has impacted their wellbeing. I want to recognise that it takes a toll to participate in those processes, so I thank them for speaking up.

I believe we stand at a critical moment in our society, and it is about shaping what kind of society we want to be. I believe that we need to have a society – and I think a majority of people want to have a

society – that values respect, dignity and unity. This bill is not just another legal reform; it is that fundamental step towards ensuring that all people, regardless of their background, regardless of where they come from, are protected from hate, discrimination and harm. For too long we have seen devastating consequences, whether it is racism, religious intolerance or other forms of hate speech that divide communities and that fuel violence. Words are powerful, and when they are used they can incite hate. They have real-world consequences.

This bill is about strengthening our laws. It is about ensuring that we condemn those behaviours but that they are also met with serious legal consequences. When vilification is more than words and it is a deliberate act of harm, it seeks to dehumanise, isolate and inflame division, and it is poised to spread fear. It undermines our social harmony, and if it is left unchecked it can lead to real-world violence, and we have seen this. There is nothing harmless about vilification, because it is not a mere expression of opinion or simple disagreement; it is about attacks on individuals and on communities. No-one should have to live in fear because of their race, their religion, their gender, their sexuality or who they are.

We must recognise that vilification does not appear out of anywhere. It is often driven by fear – fear of difference, fear of change or fear of the unknown – and there are those who seek to exploit that fear. They use it as a tool to divide us, turn communities against each other and spread misinformation for their own gain. History has shown us that when fear is weaponised, it can be catastrophic. We have seen political movements and media campaigns blaming others for societal problems. When it starts with words – hateful slogans, false accusations, divisive narratives – we know that those words can have consequences. Beyond law, this bill and our government send a very clear message: we will not tolerate hate in our communities. We will not allow people to be targeted simply for who they are. We will stand together to protect that social cohesion and build a safer, more inclusive society.

To those who question the need for stronger protections, I am going to ask you: what kind of society do we want to leave, for now and for our future generations? One where hate and division go unchecked or one where we have respect and inclusion, which will define us? By supporting this bill our government is reaffirming our commitment to fairness, justice and the idea that everyone deserves to live free from fear. Together we can ensure our communities are places where diversity is celebrated, not attacked, where communities can stand together, and we are not divided.

There are some elements to this bill where there are some new offences, and I will just quickly go through those. The bill does introduce two serious vilification offences to the Crimes Act 1958: an incitement offence and a threat offence. The incitement offence applies to conduct that is objectively likely to incite hatred against, serious contempt for, revulsion towards or severe ridicule for another person or group of persons on the grounds of a protected attribute. The offence is intended to capture extreme serious conduct, and that is punishable by up to three years imprisonment. There is a threat offence which is punishable by up to five years imprisonment as well.

But I just want to say that this bill is not about punishment, actually, it is about prevention. It is about sending that strong, powerful message that hate has no place in our society. It reaffirms that our commitment to free speech does not extend to speech that seeks to destroy the very freedoms that we cherish. Some may argue that laws cannot change attitudes, but I believe laws can set standards and they set expectations about how we treat each other. They protect our vulnerable, hold hateful people to account and make it clear that our society stands for that justice. At its core, this bill is about who we are and who we aspire to be and whether we will accept a culture of division or whether we will demand something better – and we must demand something better.

In conclusion, I would just like to end on maybe a more positive note about our future here in this state. I think that this bill and the conversations that we have seen today in this place on this bill are about a shared, fundamental, collective belief that we need respect for each other and that our diverse communities and the values that define our society are around respect for each other, because when we stand together we embrace our diversity, and it is a source of strength.

Victoria is home to many people from all around the world. We are shaped by migrants and our First Nations people, generations of communities who have brought their languages, cultures and traditions and woven them into the fabric of our society. That is what makes us stronger. This bill ensures that every Victorian, regardless of where they were born, what they believe or who they are, can walk down the street without fear and that they can live, work and contribute to a society where they know they are valued and respected and protected.

There is no greater strength in society than its people standing together, united not by a sameness but by our shared values and a commitment to looking after each other's wellbeing. Social cohesion is not that lofty ideal. It is actually the foundations from which prosperous communities are built. That is the Victoria we believe in, that is the Victoria that we will fight for and that is the Victoria that we will protect. I commend the bill to the house.

**Gary MAAS** (Narre Warren South) (18:10): It too gives me great pleasure and indeed pride to rise and to speak to this bill, the Justice Legislation Amendment (Anti-vilification and Social Cohesion) Bill 2024. In doing so I would like to acknowledge a few speakers and of course the speaker before me, the member for Bellarine. It is really terrific that she mentioned the core values of what actually makes us Labor. We speak to Labor values always in this place. When we speak to respect, when we speak to dignity and when we speak to fairness and through notions of collectivity and sticking together, we are speaking our Labor values. That is why each and every one of us has been rising to speak to this bill. It is also demonstrative of the fact that we have consulted so widely on this bill to ensure that we get the bill right before it passes or goes through the lower house in this Parliament.

The bill, as we have heard, will deliver a tranche of reforms to expand and strengthen our anti-vilification laws to better protect all Victorians from serious harms of vilification and hate conduct. It includes implementing 15 of the legislative recommendations of the 2021 Victorian parliamentary inquiry into anti-vilification protections. The bill will expand anti-vilification protections from race and religion to also protect the attributes of disability, gender identity, sex, sex characteristics, sexual orientation and personal association with a person who has a protected attribute. It will repeal the Racial and Religious Tolerance Act 2001 and remove criminal vilification offences to the Crimes Act 1958 and civil anti-vilification protections to the Equal Opportunity Act 2010. It will improve how serious vilification offences operate, including by introducing new serious vilification offences. It will improve how civil protections operate, including by modifying the civil incitement-based protection, introducing a new harm-based protection and retaining the civil exceptions with minor amendment, and retain the key features of the RRTA, including protections from racial and religious vilification. It will also make some technical amendments to the Bail Act 1977 to ensure that bail decision-makers can remand a person who is charged with intentionally performing a Nazi gesture.

I mentioned before that there were some speakers in this place who I would note. I really appreciated the contribution that the member for Clarinda made before. He spoke quite beautifully as to his journey to this place. Indeed it is a terrific story of migration, a story of migration that many in this house have shared. He also mentioned the difficult and quite often devastating effects that go with racial disharmony and the effects of being told, even lately as his is an MP in this place, to go back to where you came from. These are words which weaponise. They are words of hate. But we all know communities such as the Cambodian community and such as the Indian community, as with the member for Mulgrave, who also made an excellent contribution, and our fantastic Italian comrades, if I can put it that way, of the member for Monbulk and the thousand words a minute that came from the member for Pascoe Vale.

All of their contributions spoke to what it is to come to this great country, to be able to make contributions in a harmonious and very socially cohesive and indeed beautiful way as opposed to being in a place of division and hate. That is why we all speak to this bill. I did mention the extensive consultation that has taken place to see where things could be improved, and again I am proud to be supporting the amendments that have been put forward by the government to the bill. These two amendments will remove the political purpose defence to the criminal incitement offence and add



proselytising and preaching into the civil religious purpose exceptions. This includes a genuine political purpose defence to the incitement offence. When we said that would be in the bill, that was to ensure a consistency with the constitutionally implied freedom of political communication. It was never intended to expand that protection, but we have listened, and so we have made that amendment.

The government has continued conversations with community leaders, and we fully acknowledge and appreciate the concern expressed by many that the provision could have been misused and potentially legitimised vilification under the guise of political communication, and as such, as I have said, we have removed that provision. Doing so will not affect the operation of the offences, and existing general statutory and common-law defences such as self-defence, duress and the defence of mental impairment apply to the offences, and this is consistent with the current law.

Indeed it is now up to the Liberal Party and what their views are, given that we have made these amendments, because when we were here a fortnight ago these were the crux of the opposition as to why this bill would not be supported. I understand now that we are informed that they are still opposed to this bill. None of them have even risen to speak to that opposition, but we are somehow led to believe that it is due to a technicality, really, in that somehow the test that would be there for anti-vilification is a subjective test in law to determine whether hate speech is constituted as a civil offence. Subjective tests are held all the time in many laws that have passed in this place and indeed in the state of Victoria; subjective tests are always applied by the courts to determine where the law stands. We in this place have a tremendous privilege to be able to create laws and to be able to pass them and to then have those laws interpreted and indeed declared by the judiciary. It is the function of any proper democracy; it is a function of a democracy that ensures that we have a harmonious place to live, that people from all over the world, from different lands, can come to this great place, this great state of Victoria, to live and to be able to contribute and to not be vilified due to their sex, their gender, their race, their sexual orientation or their attributes of disability.

That is why I stand here very, very proudly in support of this bill. I commend the ton of work that has gone in to ensuring that this bill is ready to pass this place. I commend the work of the Attorney-General, and I commend all members on this side of the house. I commend the bill to the house.

**Luba GRIGOROVITCH** (Kororoit) (18:20): Thank you to my colleague who just spoke, the member for Narre Warren South, and to everyone in this house who have made so many heartfelt contributions. It genuinely is appreciated, and the silence from the opposition is absolutely deafening. I think it is so important that we get up and speak about it as much as you possibly can, because as the previous member said – and many others – it is a privilege. It is a privilege of ours, as local members of Parliament who have been elected to represent communities and represent Victorians, to get up and have our say about legislation. If someone in this chamber disagrees with a piece of legislation, that is okay – you get up and you have your say. And if you agree with it, you also get up and have your say, so I commend the many members on this side of the house who have got up and had their say.

I rise to speak about the Justice Legislation Amendment (Anti-vilification and Social Cohesion) Bill 2024, which we were hearing about a fortnight ago and now today. We are hearing about it because it is so important to all Victorians irrespective of their culture, their religion, the faith they believe in. This bill aims to deliver a tranche of reforms to expand and strengthen Victoria's anti-vilification laws. This bill is designed to protect all Victorians from the serious harm of vilification, hate speech or hate conduct.

This comes from the recommendations of the 2021 Victorian parliamentary inquiry into anti-vilification protections. It is my honour to be able to speak about this bill and speak in support of this bill. I bamboozled that those opposite have indicated that they will be voting against this bill. I would like them to reconsider these actions; however, as I said earlier, it is not just your vote, it is also your silence which is deafening. The hypocrisy from those opposite is absolutely astonishing. Those opposite often talk the talk, but this bill and their silence prove that it is clearly just a show.

I am not ashamed to say that I love how multicultural Victoria is. I love that we have more than 300 ethnicities here in Victoria. I love that we speak 290 languages, and I love that we have and celebrate over 200 faiths. We are blessed to be able to experience the many wonderful events that come from being so accepting and so multicultural. Whether it be Lunar New Year, Ramadan, the Holi festival, Eid or Diwali, the list is just endless, and I know that many members in this chamber have gone to a number of those events. We get to day in, day out celebrate cultures from other countries here in Victoria as proud Victorians and proud Australians and as part of our community.

The Allan Labor government not only supports but well and truly gets behind every single multicultural community, because the very good majority of these communities are proud Australians and treat each other with dignity and respect. But for the small minority that do not, we need this legislation in place, and we need legislation like this to be there. Hate and vilification in this state is not okay, and this bill is about speaking up. This bill is about being a leader against racism, and we should come together with things that unite us, not divide us. Antisemitic graffiti at Mount Scopus or anywhere is unacceptable. Antisemitic slurs are completely unacceptable. The vile antisemitic videos that we saw last week of those two New South Wales nurses are completely unacceptable. It is not our Australia, and I commend the Minns government on their swift action and for standing them down right away.

Both the Jewish and Muslim communities are our friends, and they are Australians. Many, many – the vast majority – of them are very good Australians, and they make the tapestry in Australia, in Victoria, what it is. Similar to one of the previous members who spoke, I also have an end-of-year award that I give out, the Kororoit leadership award. For this award I make the criteria really clear: I want it to go to a student that leads with respect and treats others the way that they want to be treated.

Isn't that what we all want from our youth? Isn't that what we want from Australians and from Victorians? And I know in Kororoit, in Sydenham, in St Albans, in Melton, in Point Cook, in Melbourne's west, we lead and we advocate daily for respect and for love, and we preach respect as local members because that is what we are there to do. We are there to unite our communities together, to lead with respect and to bring people together. I see that day in, day out in Kororoit, whether it be the Sri Durga Temple, which I visit quite frequently, the largest Hindu temple in the Southern Hemisphere. Now I have got to say that it is a community that well and truly shows Australia how to be Victorian, how to be Australian. They unite like there is no tomorrow. They bring their community together and they always help out. No matter what is going on in Victoria, they are there.

The Qaim Foundation, I want to make mention of them, also in Kororoit. Last year a few members of their executive came to me and said, 'Oh, Ramadan is coming up; we would love to have an interfaith community celebration for Ramadan. Do you think you could help organise it?' I did assist organising it, Minister Stitt from the other place came along as our special guest of honour and it was an absolute triumph, and I am really proud to say that we will be doing that multi-faith celebration again this year. There are so many places of faith in Kororoit; it is a melting pot of multiculturalism, but there is no place for racism. Respect, dignity and fairness in each of our communities makes our great state.

The member for Glen Waverley and the member for Ashwood both spoke about vilification towards our Chinese community during the COVID-19 times. I am sorry that your communities which you each represent experienced that, and it actually triggered my memory. During that time of COVID-19, I was the secretary of the Rail, Tram and Bus Union, and I will never forget that one day one of my members who is a station officer down at Flinders Street station came into the office and he was absolutely mortified. There was a passenger waiting to get on a train and then there was another passenger and one of the passengers was of Asian ethnicity. This passenger went up to this other passenger and started spitting at him and yelling at him, blaming him and China for COVID-19. My member, the station officer, did not know what to do. But it is those acts of racism that are not okay. It is those acts of racism that we should not allow in Victoria, we should not allow in Australia. I really commend the Allan Labor government for taking action against that and for doing so much research into this piece of legislation.

Similarly to many in this chamber, I have also had the great honour of visiting Yad Vashem, Israel's official memorial to the victims of the Holocaust. A remembrance centre which is dedicated to preserving the memories and echoing the stories of survivors of the Holocaust and honouring them, its main aim is education – photos, documents, personal artefacts. To me, it does not matter which religion you are or which culture you are – none of that matters. What matters is that we teach, that we treat each other with respect and we treat each other with the dignity which we all deserve. Hate speech is simply not okay. It is not okay anywhere. It is not okay behind closed doors, it is not okay out in the streets or in a bar when you are hanging out with your friends, it is certainly not okay in this place and it is not okay in Victoria, and that is what the Allan Labor government is saying with this piece of legislation.

In concluding my contribution, I want to reiterate that I commend this bill to the house, and I state how very proud I am of the Allan Labor government for the extensive consultation that has taken place in this bill. Respect, dignity and fairness are what Victoria is about and what Australia is about. It is what every local member in this place should be advocating for on a daily basis, because if we do not have respect, if we do not have dignity, if we do not treat each other with fairness, then why are we here? We should be here to serve our communities with all of those values and to treat each other the way we want to be treated. I commend this bill, and again, I urge those opposite who have been absolutely silent to come forward and speak. If you are against this legislation, tell us why you are against this legislation. At this point in time, you are not doing that and to me that is cowardly.

**Mathew HILAKARI** (Point Cook) (18:29): I rise to speak on and support the Justice Legislation Amendment (Anti-vilification and Social Cohesion) Bill 2024. I am surprised to be following the member for Kororoit, because usually I follow on from a member of the opposition. It is quite confusing for me when there is a bill before this place that is opposed by those opposite and they decide not to speak on it. It is Labor member after Labor member talking about exactly why they support this bill, rather than those opposite living out their values through their voice in this place. Each of us are elected to provide our voice in this place, and after having two weeks with this bill in front of the house, it is quite astounding that not everybody is using their voice to speak on this bill.

I also follow on from the member for Narre Warren South before that. The member for Kororoit did say something that really struck me, which was that there is no place for racism. There is also no place for vilification and no place for discrimination in the state of Victoria, and we should be working every day against that. That is part of the reason that we have been bringing bills like this to this place, amongst many other bills, to make Victoria a safer and a fairer place, because it is important to have a safe community to live in, to be safe, to feel safe, to not feel threatened, to not feel discriminated against and to not feel vilified. I also follow on from the member for Clarinda, my chamber neighbour, who made an extraordinary contribution; from the member for Mulgrave, who did exactly the same; and many other members on this side of the house.

We have been spending, as a Labor government, some time listening to the community's concerns about a bill that was presented late last year and now into this year, and we should take the time to listen. I was at a community forum just yesterday in fact, and the member for Gellibrand Tim Watts gave a very good quotable quote that I thought was a great one. It is that we have got two ears and one mouth, and we should use them in that order and in that proportion. We have taken the time to listen to the community and we have come up with some amendments. No piece of legislation is ever going to be perfect. We are going to revisit legislation from time to time. That is the process of government. It is seeking that perfection in this state of Victoria; it is seeking that perfection in the laws that we seek to pass and amend from time to time.

I want to talk a little bit about the community that I represent, the community of Point Cook. I have said this before, and despite what others might say to disagree with me – and I tell them they are wrong – Point Cook is the most multicultural community in all of Australia. The Australian Bureau of Statistics tell us so. I would never choose to disagree with them. Those who seek to shrug, shake their head or do otherwise are disagreeing with the premier statisticians across the country. What it means

to be the representative for the most multicultural community in all of Australia is to have the complete enjoyment of learning and understanding communities that are not my own and that are not the Finnish and English traditions that I have grown up with.

Recently we celebrated Lunar New Year and Chinese New Year in particular for the community that I represent, because 14 per cent of the community do have Chinese heritage or were born in China themselves. I say to them: gōng xǐ fā cái and kung hei fat choi. My pronunciation is never going to be right, but I will try. Members on this side of the house try all the time. That is the important thing: trying.

I want to make an acknowledgement to Larry Zhao and all the team that put that festival together. They brought 15,000 members of our community to a suburban shopping strip to celebrate the Lunar New Year festival. I want to acknowledge Bob Fairclough, the former mayor of our community, who passed away recently and who was the biggest advocate for that event. His son Jason got up and delivered an amazing acknowledgement of his father, and he delivered half of it in Mandarin, because his dad had spoken to him about the importance of language and using that to understand a community and be part of a community. I am jealous of many people in our community who do speak a second language. I speak little bits of French and little bits of Turkish – enough to get me around and enough to talk to people sometimes in the ALP – but beyond that I do struggle with languages. I want to acknowledge Sara from Kaleidoscope Festival, who is putting on a 10-week festival in the pop-up park in the community that I represent. It started last weekend with the Bunurong welcome to country – a community with 65,000 years of continuous connection to culture and country in the community that I represent.

We had a smoking ceremony and dancing performances. It was all held on the Rainbow Serpent mural, which is carved across a road that has been closed so it can be a community space, a pop-up park. That was done by the artist Fiona Clarke. For those who have not read her wonderful book *Minkgill Chases the Rainbow*, I encourage you to do so. It is a terrific book that I give to all our kindergartens and childcare centres that I visit. It is something that I read to my own son. You know how children are when they are growing up – they have got different favourites at different times – but that was often on repeat.

Next weekend is the Philippine Fiesta. Today we had the Consul General Maria Lourdes Salcedo in the Parliament, and we were honoured to have her here. She is finishing up soon and has done a great service in bringing our Filipino Australian community together. We had Florence Dato, and I thank her for bringing along the Pasko sa Melbourne organising team. It was great to see different members of this place: the member for Cranbourne, who was here, the member for Kororoit and the Minister for Multicultural Affairs in the other place. The soon-to-be member of Parliament for Werribee was able to attend that as well, which was terrific. They talked to us about the concerns of the community and how we might be able to respond to them and some of the things that are happening in their communities, which are actually the same things that are happening in every community. Their concerns were our concerns, because we are one great multicultural community. It is our greatest strength – our diversity is our greatest strength.

We will be having Latino fiesta. It is just around the corner. I say to people who have not been to Lola Melona, which is a cafe in Saltwater in Point Cook, that arepas are the true answer to cheese toasties and are far superior. You are welcome to quote me, but you are also welcome to join me there and demonstrate that that is a truth.

It will be followed by Bolly Holi. Seventeen per cent of the suburb of Point Cook were either born in India or have an Indian background. Holi celebrates spring, love and new life. We all know that being in the Southern Hemisphere it is a time of autumn, but we celebrate all the same. I know that many people on this side of the house and also those opposite will be pleased to celebrate with the Indian community their holy festivals. They are not actually willing to celebrate all parts of the Indian experience and some of the important figures within Indian history, but of course they are happy to

throw the colours when it comes along, so I hope that they can embrace other aspects beyond the festival.

The Pasifika community is a growing community in the south-west of Melbourne. We will be celebrating with them on 23 March. The Greek festival follows on the 5 April. Many people are accustomed to it in this place, and the member for Northcote is nodding along with that. You are always welcome, of course. It will be followed soon by Harmony Day.

I am running out of time, so I am just going to run through them – Eid festival for the growing Islamic community in the area of Point Cook. They are so large now that they are filling the library every week on a Friday for Friday prayers, and they need more space. Wyndham council, if you are listening, they need more space. Religious facilities have not been accommodated in the community that I represent. Temples, mosques, churches, gurdwaras – we need some of those across all of our community.

Easter festival will follow that. I invite all members to join me at the second annual Easter egg hunt. You will have to be quick, because it took about 30 seconds to soak up several thousand eggs. It was about 30 seconds and it was wonderful. That was shared by all of our community again, because that is the wonderful nature of the communities of Victoria – strong communities, vibrant communities, communities that should be free from discrimination, communities that should be free from vilification.

If that basic hurdle, that very low hurdle, cannot be supported by everyone in this place, what are we really doing? It is a low bar, not to vilify people. To those who are opposite who cannot speak to their values in this place, I say: you have got time to get up and tell us why you oppose this bill. We have been listening and making changes for that reason. I commend this bill to this house.

**Bronwyn HALFPENNY** (Thomastown) (18:39): I stand up here to speak on the Justice Legislation Amendment (Anti-vilification and Social Cohesion) Bill 2024, and I think I have to say, along with others that have spoken today, that it is a sad time when we actually do have to debate and pass legislation like this in order to protect Victorians from the incredible harm that can result from vilification, hate speech and racism. It is also a sad day of course when there is not bipartisanship in passing this legislation in order to protect Victorians from the worst of such vilifications and terrible behaviour by, still, a minority of people. We know that laws alone do not completely stop this sort of behaviour, but that is of course why the Allan Labor government has introduced along with this legislation many other programs and policies and education to address racism, prejudice and hate. But of course you also need legislation that will ensure that it is not just about raising awareness, changing people's minds and creating understanding; there also need to be repercussions, and people need to be accountable and responsible for the actions they take in treating others in some of the most appalling ways.

I spoke earlier today about a recent incident at the Pacific Epping plaza involving a terrible – well, violent – assault against two women who were just going about their normal business. One works there and was on a lunchbreak minding her own business, only to be set upon in such an awful and terrible way. I think it does not help when the federal opposition leader and the way he behaves really give licence to people to act in this hateful and awful way, enabling them to stand up as if it is okay, because in many a way the federal Leader of the Opposition is trying to create this division and hatred of others in order to fulfil his party's own political ambitions and goals.

Much of the legislation, really, that we are talking about today comes from the Victorian parliamentary inquiry into vilification protections, which was in 2021, and it was the member for St Albans who was the chair of that committee. I know at the time I was here in this place and there was great admiration for the results of that inquiry – the recommendations and the findings. At that time, as I recall, the majority – in fact I think it was unanimous, all members – of that inquiry were supportive of the recommendations, including Liberal Party members. Here we are as part of this legislation wanting to enact or bring into being at least 15 of the recommendations from that inquiry, and here we have a

case now where the opposition are opposed to this legislation, which enacts many of the recommendations from that inquiry.

The inquiry found that existing laws are not necessarily effective and are often inaccessible and recommended extending anti-vilification law to protect more Victorians and also to strengthen how the laws operate and make them more clear and also easier to implement. Fifteen of the inquiry's recommendations will be given effect, as I said, with this legislation, and at least one of the recommendations from the Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability is also incorporated into the bill.

In general terms, the legislation will extend anti-vilification protections from race and religion to also protect the attributes of disability, gender identity, sex, sex characteristics, sexual orientation and personal association with a person who has a protected attribute.

It will, as has been mentioned before, repeal the Racial and Religious Tolerance Act 2001 and move the criminal anti-vilification offences into the Crimes Act 1958, where they belong. Then of course there will be the civil anti-vilification protections in the Equal Opportunity Act 2010 – again, putting these offences in the places where they will best be able to be implemented. It also will improve how serious vilification offences operate, including by introducing new serious vilification offences. It will also improve how civil protections operate, and there will be technical amendments to the Bail Act 1977 to ensure that bail decision-makers can remand a person who is charged with intentionally performing a Nazi gesture. This, again, came from previous legislation we introduced. Often it is the case that legislation is in a way a living thing, and as society changes, trial and error, things happen, laws are used, sometimes it is determined that they could be done in a better way. There is a little bit of that in this legislation, as well as new offences and a new piece of legislation.

In saying what we are doing with this and talking about hate crimes and vilification, I would just like to give a really big shout-out to the residents of the Thomastown electorate and even the City of Whittlesea overall, because we talk about these things, and there are also a lot of good people and a lot of good in the world. I look at some of the organisations in the area that I represent, and they do so much good work in a sharing culture, trying to bridge any misunderstandings, inviting people from different faiths and cultures and backgrounds into a safe place where there is a celebration of some sort and then exchanging different food. We also have quite formal organisations, like interfaith groups that meet regularly, as well as all the different societies and organisations that celebrate their own cultures and faiths but also are very, very happy and generous in sharing that culture and faith with others as well. I know as a member of Parliament it is a great privilege to be in a position like this where you can learn so much from other people in the area, and also of course indulge in the most delicious of food. This is what makes society so vibrant and exciting and caring, when we have not everybody the same but lots of differences and we respect those differences and we enjoy those differences.

When it comes to things like hate speech and vilification we also need to ensure that those behaviours, which we all know are not okay, have to have serious consequences in order to protect the good people in Victoria. I have seen cases of racism and misunderstandings and some pretty offensive language and behaviours. I was pretty shocked, I have to say, when just last weekend – coming to why we need legislation like this – it was open mosque day on Saturday. This is an event that is held every year where people of Muslim faith open up the mosques in many areas – and I know many members from this side of the house would have been visiting many mosques on the Saturday – to show others that are not of that faith what goes on in a mosque and what the teachings are about, and also to invite people in to increase that understanding. I started off at the Islamic Council of Victoria, then went on to the Alawi Islamic Social Centre and then to my good friends at the Thomastown mosque. When I went in it was all about love, generosity, peace and harmony, and then sadly when I posted about this event I got some of the most horrific and appalling comments.

**Pauline RICHARDS** (Cranbourne) (18:50): I am very pleased to have the opportunity right at the end of the day to contribute on an extraordinarily important piece of legislation: the Justice Legislation Amendment (Anti-vilification and Social Cohesion) Bill 2024. What an extraordinary honour it is to be able to make a contribution alongside my colleagues, following after the member for Thomastown, whose credentials in care and concern and the deep relationships that have been built in her electorate are perfect examples and exemplars for so many of us across the chamber, actually, but certainly an exemplar for people in the Labor Party. The member for Point Cook is always experiencing and showing the generosity of that incredibly diverse community as well. I feel like I am doing the float up and down. The member for Footscray was one of the many people who talked about the importance of diversity in her electorate. I feel like we all talk about the importance of the diversity of our electorates and the way that it strengthens us, and I think that does say something about what we see as being so important, and it really does impact the fabric of our community and our role,

And of course the member for Clarinda – I am going to talk a little bit more about the member for Clarinda's contribution, because I thought that the insights that member made were particularly pertinent. I do want to reflect a little bit more on how important it is to have, again, somebody of the member's calibre but also somebody with the member for Clarinda's background, to be able to really demonstrate to us those important elements of justice and what it means to be able to contribute to our community in a way that speaks to the rights of workers and people who have experienced incredible trauma in being able to get to Australia, as so many in the member's community have.

And the member for Box Hill – I went back through *Hansard* to refresh myself on the contribution made a fortnight ago by the member for Box Hill, always thoughtful and always important and worthy of going back to. How grateful I have been to be able to reflect on that depth of contribution and the cautious but really considered way that the member has spoken about the experience of antisemitism and the consequences in our great state. I am going to pay credit as well to Naomi Levin and other members of our incredible Jewish community in Victoria. I have experienced their hospitality, but more than that, I have been so fortunate to have the opportunity to talk through and think through the real consequences, where it can be seared into the soul of a community when people are experiencing antisemitism who are direct descendants of people from the Holocaust. That does put a different complexion on this legislation, and it does put us right into the centre of why we need to act, what is important to us as legislators and why we need to also listen and consider some of the needs to even make house amendments, as we have seen today. I feel that those contributions are worthy of real reflection, and I do implore anyone to actually take the time to go back and have a look at some of those earlier contributions that were made, including at the last sitting.

The member for Clarinda spoke a little bit about a Facebook post about something that was celebrating a great element of our state, celebrating our diverse community, and the consequences when a group of trolls then started to head onto the Facebook page and write things that were unacceptable. Something similar has happened several times – not a lot, but several times – on my Facebook page.

I had a young engineer who speaks Dari offer to provide a little bit of information in Dari, recognising that I have had a look at the languages of the people born in Cranbourne, and many people who live in Cranbourne speak Dari. What a generous offer it was for somebody who is multilingual to be able to speak in her mother tongue in a way that other people can listen to and understand. I was shocked by the Islamophobia and sheer, vile racism that people thought was acceptable to put on my Facebook page. I did have a quick look and noticed that many of the people – and in some ways this was a comfort – who were making the most outrageous and vile comments did not live in Victoria. They certainly lived north of the Murray in New South Wales and Queensland, and some over in WA, but in fact there were very few people who had made these particularly vile comments who were from Victoria. I choose to believe that our community and our state is strengthened by our diversity, and this bill will actually strengthen it.

It is a privilege to make a contribution to this bill. The anti-vilification and social cohesion bill is a bill about protection. It is about dignity, and it is about the promise of a safer Victoria for all. I think that

we have seen that demonstrated so often in the way that we have heard the contributions that have been made. I do also want to make mention of the member for Mulgrave and the heartfelt way the member spoke about her own family's journey and again the generosity of the way people share their stories. This is about ensuring no-one feels unsafe because of who they are, where they come from or what they believe in. It is about saying loudly and clearly that we will not tolerate hate in our community, no matter where it comes from or who it targets. It does come at a time in our society when vilification is not just a distant issue, it is an everyday reality for far too many.

As the member for St Albans has joined us, I take the opportunity to pay credit to the member for her role in chairing the 2021 inquiry into anti-vilification. So much of this work has come from the deep and considered policy work that was undertaken at that time. This is important work that has its genesis in a great passion and consideration from the Minister for Veterans, the minister at the table, and how grateful we are to the minister for the role that she has undertaken.

[NAMES AWAITING VERIFICATION]

This bill is incredibly important, because we are not just legislating change, we are sending a clear message that we will not tolerate hate in any form. In Cranbourne this message resonates deeply. Like so many have mentioned – and I love the way the member for Broadmeadows talked about how she could spend one week journeying through so many of the different faith and religious organisations in her electorate. Last Saturday I was very fortunate to go to Open Mosque Day. I still have the result of that beautiful henna done at the Hallam mosque, where I was with the member for Narre Warren North and the member for Narre Warren South. The member for Narre Warren North and I spent a couple of hours at the Hallam mosque. It was the extraordinary hospitality and the samosas that might have kept us there. I want to thank the Albanian mosque as well. I was very lucky to be at the Albanian Sakie mosque as well, and I want to thank Amir for the way he welcomed us. My own Cranbourne mosque was not open, but I have spent a lot of time having cups of tea with Sister Nazra and Sister Nishana, and I look forward to many more cups of tea in the future. On Sunday night BAPS celebrated the arrival of their great guru His Holiness, and what an amazing opportunity it was with the member for Narre Warren South, the member for Greenvale who represented the Premier, Mr Tarlamis in the other place and Ms Watt in the other place.

Every day I see how we are strengthened in the community that I represent and serve. The Sikh volunteers are providing food at every opportunity, and I wish that the new Leader of the Opposition and the member for Berwick had taken the opportunity to contribute, along with many other of his colleagues. It would have been good to hear him supporting or explaining his opposition to this legislation. This is important work. I pay credit to it. I commend it.

**Business interrupted under sessional orders.**

### *Adjournment*

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** The question is:

That the house now adjourns.

### **Emergency services volunteers**

**Roma BRITNELL** (South-West Coast) (19:00): (1001) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Emergency Services, and the action I seek is that the minister meet with me to clarify which emergency services volunteer organisations are included in the Emergency Services and Volunteers Fund. In mid December the government announced an increased levy for emergency services volunteer organisations. However, it only funds two organisations: the CFA and VICSES. Concerningly, organisations such as the coastguard, Marine Search and Rescue, St John Ambulance and Life Saving Victoria, to name a few, appear to have been excluded and are not to benefit from the ESVF. Like the CFA and VICSES, these excluded organisations are also struggling to get volunteers and replace and upgrade equipment.



The government crowed that every single dollar raised by this new fund will support our emergency and disaster recovery services. It clearly does not. In reality most of the raised revenue will fund the core government services such as Triple Zero Victoria, the State Control Centre, Forest Fire Management Victoria, Emergency Recovery Victoria as well as Fire Rescue Victoria, which do not have volunteers. Precious little will actually assist emergency services volunteer organisations. The CFA are concerned that they will not receive enough funds to replace their ageing fleet.

It is called the Emergency Services and Volunteers Fund, but it excludes most emergency services volunteers. The two eligible organisations covered are the CFA and VICSES, and their volunteers get an exemption on the levy on their homes while other volunteers miss out. How is this just? Doesn't the government value the volunteer efforts of other emergency services volunteer organisations? Anger is growing among the hardworking volunteers that have been overlooked. Not only will their organisations not receive a slice of the funding, but volunteers will not receive the levy exemption on their homes. This is patently unfair. It is an insult to those volunteers who give their time to help the public.

Despite being affiliated with the CFA, the coastguard have received no word whether they are included. They fear the worst. The coastguard are often the first people at the scene of a tragic accident in our waters, as we have seen over the summer. What is going on? Will coastguard volunteers receive the exemption like their CFA volunteer colleagues? St John Ambulance volunteers do valuable work at events across Victoria, which helps our tourism sector, and are often on the scene at car accidents. They feel like they have been intentionally excluded. The Port Fairy marine rescue are partner organisations of the CFA. They are trained, they have equipment onboard to put out fires on ships and boats. It should not matter what titles are used to describe emergency volunteers. They help in critical emergencies and do it voluntarily. We should show gratitude as a community, not overlook them as the Allan Labor government has chosen to do.

#### **Cranbourne electorate community safety**

**Pauline RICHARDS** (Cranbourne) (19:03): (1002) My adjournment is to the Minister for Community Safety, and the action I seek is an update on the work being done by the Allan Labor government to enhance community safety in Cranbourne. In my community of Cranbourne we have extraordinary police working tirelessly to keep us safe. Just last week we opened a brand new Orange Door in Cranbourne's High Street because we acknowledge that family violence is the greatest law and order challenge we face. I am aware of the amazing work being undertaken in schools with our recently boosted funding for homework clubs, and of course we are providing mental health practitioners in schools. We particularly need to keep our young people on the straight and narrow. We need to get young people into jobs, and ensuring that 10 per cent of jobs on our big government projects are allocated to apprentices and trainees is part of that work. I am proud to be part of a government that focuses on the causes of crime, but I am also conscious that more needs to be done to keep our community safe. I look forward to hearing an update from the minister on how our government is responding to issues of community safety.

#### **Gippsland East electorate wind farms**

**Danny O'BRIEN** (Gippsland South) (19:04): (1003) My adjournment this evening is for the Minister for Energy and Resources, and the action I seek is for the minister to immediately rule out a second onshore connection point for offshore wind through Waratah Bay and South Gippsland. This is an issue that has recently come up as a result of community consultation by one of the proponents of offshore wind, Gippsland Skies. They have been highlighting the prospect of rather than going through Ninety Mile Beach and Giffard West or a Giffard connection point, as has been promoted by VicGrid, they might come up through Waratah Bay and South Gippsland to connect to the grid at Hazelwood or Loy Yang.

This is the exact opposite of what this government had proposed to do. The government said it was setting up VicGrid to coordinate and to avoid a spaghettiification I think is perhaps the word – a

spaghetti-like effect of having lots of transmission lines everywhere. To now have one of these companies saying that they have spoken to VicGrid and that they could come up through Waratah Bay and South Gippsland is just disgraceful, and the minister needs to rule it out right now.

I am aware of people in South Gippsland who are already concerned. We have the Marinus Link project coming up from Tasmania through Waratah Bay and into the Latrobe Valley through South Gippsland, but that is being proposed as an underground line. Although there are many landholders who are not happy about it, they are certainly happier that it is underground, not above ground. If Gippsland Skies is to be allowed to connect with overhead 500 kilovolt powerlines, there will be many, many, many people who will be very upset about it. Indeed I know there are some people from South Gippsland in the gallery tonight who would no doubt be very concerned about it. They may not even know about it, because very few people do.

The government has said it established VicGrid to avoid exactly these sorts of situations. It is unconscionable that the minister and VicGrid would now allow this to occur. The whole idea of VicGrid – and I have supported the notion from the start – is to make sure that we coordinate this transmission line. If the government's idea of these 12 different offshore wind farms is that they can all come where it suits them, particularly on the shortest route, then that is wrong. The government has the opportunity now to work with the Commonwealth and to work with the developers proposing the offshore wind farms and say, 'No. We have told you through Giffard, one line.' That is what they should be doing, not exposing the beautiful South Gippsland hills to yet another transmission line. That is not something that the people of South Gippsland will accept. I will not be accepting it, and the government needs to rule it out now.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** I remind members that acknowledging members of the gallery is disorderly.

#### **Mordialloc electorate level crossing removals**

**Tim RICHARDSON** (Mordialloc) (19:07): (1004) My adjournment this evening is to the Minister for Transport Infrastructure, and the action I seek is an update for the Mordialloc constituency on the progress of level crossing removal works in Mordialloc and Aspendale and the timeframes for those removals. We have seen early works get underway in Mordialloc and Aspendale, with service assessments in water, in gas, in electricity and in combined services routes. This is muscle memory for our community, who have seen level crossing removals in Chelsea, in Edithvale, in Parkdale, in Mentone and in Cheltenham, because in our community Labor is delivering each and every day, making it easier and safer for people to get to where they need to get to safer and sooner.

The Aspendale and Mordialloc level crossings are really important connectors in our local community. There are two level crossings, Bear Street that will close and McDonald that will be removed with an elevated rail, and then Station Street, Aspendale, opposite the magnificent and recently 100-year-old Mordialloc College has been a divider in our community for many decades. Over 12,000 vehicle movements pass through there each and every day. It is one of the more dangerous ones left on the alignment. It comes on the back of the completion of elevated rail works at Parkdale, where we have seen Parkers Road and Warrigal Road removed and the significant transformation that has achieved.

We heard every bit over the last number of years, and I remember back to former Premier Napthine saying that the removal of level crossings was not possible – you could not remove 50 level crossings.

**Pauline Richards** interjected.

**Tim RICHARDSON:** He said we were dreaming, as the member for Cranbourne says. We were dreaming about removing these level crossings. Yet now we see the coalition commentating on them – how they should be removed, what they should look like – and opposing them half the time in my area. Then we see now the transformation that comes from making those decisions and fronting up to community and demonstrating the benefits.

Mordialloc is such a significant part of our local community, really the jewel of the City of Kingston. It is a magnificent place to gather and come together in the community – so really critical. We have seen early works get underway. We have seen tree removals during this time at Groves Reserve, and this has had a big impact on my local community. We have seen a lot of vegetation taken out. Some of these banksia trees are of huge significance to the local community. I acknowledge that there is a significant amount of concern – grief – that goes with losing some of these significant environmental assets that people have come to know and that have stood the test of time for decades. We have done everything we can to mitigate that impact, but I can assure community that of the 260 significant trees in Groves Reserve, a hundred or so are being removed and everything will be planted like for like. And then we will see 85,000 trees and shrubs planted through that time. We are underway with the early works, and I am looking forward to an update from the minister on the progress of these works.

### **Gippsland rail line**

**Wayne FARNHAM** (Narracan) (19:10): (1005) My adjournment this evening is to the Minister for Transport Infrastructure, and the action I seek is clarification on when the Gippsland line is going to suffer a 70-day closure. This has come to my attention not through the government but through locals in my area and at the local train station. I have been told that the government is planning quite a significant shutdown. I acknowledge there are going to be some minor shutdowns in February and March – it is on the website. But this rail line now has been getting closed for years, and I am sick and tired of the government not saying what they will do or keeping the communication lines open. Poor communication leads to confusion. I do not think it is too much to ask when such a significant shutdown is going to occur so the community can forward plan. We have schoolchildren on this train line. We have people working in Melbourne. It carries a significant amount of traffic. What the government does not realise is that a train ride from, say, Warragul to Melbourne, which normally takes about an hour and a half, now will take over 3 hours in a bus. That is a significant inconvenience to the community. I understand it has to happen. It is a signal upgrade of the entire line – I can accept that. But what I cannot accept on behalf of my community is no communication from the government, because you can imagine this is a huge imposition.

Unfortunately, down our way the government has form with not consulting the community. They promised to upgrade the line from Bunyip to Longwarry. There was going to be a duplication of the line along with the Bunyip River bridge. That started back in 2017. Come late 2022 or early 2023 the government had scrapped it; it was not to happen anymore. So my community is pretty sceptical when it comes to consultation with government.

I do not think it is too much to ask this government, if this is going to occur, when it is going to occur so my community have the heads up and can plan in advance for their travels.

### **Kororoit electorate road safety**

**Luba GRIGOROVITCH** (Kororoit) (19:12): (1006) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety. The action I seek is for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety to explore and implement all potential temporary measures to improve traffic flow and safety, particularly at the northbound and southbound exits off the Western Freeway at Leakes Road. The rapid population growth in Kororoit and across the Melton region has led to significant pressures on our local infrastructure, especially in relation to the roads and intersections that service key access points for daily commuters. As we know, the Victorian government has already shown its strong commitment to enhancing road infrastructure by allocating \$10 million for the business case to upgrade this section of the Western Freeway. This of course is a positive step forward, and I commend the government for that. Additionally, the accelerated removal of dangerous level crossings along the Melton line, such as the Hopkins Road crossing, is a clear indication of this government's drive to improve safety and efficiency for the tens of thousands of daily commuters who rely on these critical roads.

However, despite these significant investments, the rapid population growth in Kororoit and the broader Melton LGA is placing enormous strain on our road network. Areas like Rockbank,

Truganina, Aintree, Mount Atkinson, Grandview and Bridgefield are among some of the fastest growing suburbs in Australia, with 72 families moving into the region every single week. The population explosion has resulted in heavy traffic congestion, particularly at the Leakes Road exits, both northbound and southbound, from the Western Freeway. These intersections have become notorious for bottlenecking traffic, leading to unsafe driving behaviour, including dangerous manoeuvres by frustrated drivers who are simply trying to avoid delays. This poses a serious risk to road safety, endangering both commuters and residents.

While I strongly commend the Labor government's ongoing investment in road infrastructure, I believe that more immediate action is required to ensure the safety of my constituents in Kororoit. I ask that the minister consider temporary measures to alleviate these traffic bottlenecks and improve safety until the comprehensive upgrades outlined in the business cases are completed. These temporary measures could include improved traffic management during peak hours, such as traffic lights being installed, clearer lane markings or enhanced signage to help guide drivers through these intersections more safely and efficiently.

With the rapid population growth and the increasing demand on our roadways, it is clear that now is the time to act. The residents of Kororoit and surrounding areas deserve safer, more efficient access to the Western Freeway. I ask that the minister urgently investigate and implement these temporary solutions to improve both the flow of traffic and the safety of all road users in this crucial part of Melbourne's west.

#### **Waste and recycling management**

**Tim READ** (Brunswick) (19:15): (1007) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Environment, and the action I seek is that the Victorian government mandate high-quality recycling systems in multi-unit developments. Multi-unit developments can make their own waste and recycling arrangements and often use private companies of varying quality. Many apartment residents are therefore unable to access recycling in the same way as their peers in detached, lower density housing who use council waste services and recycling outcomes in apartment blocks are poorer as a result. I heard today from a resident in an apartment building in my electorate that residents leave waste in a landfill and a recycling bin but they are then collected and combined into the same truck. Unaware that this is the work of a private company, people can be forgiven for thinking the recycling is a scam. But organisations like Reground have been working with apartment residents to create successful recycling systems featuring recycling rooms that are bright, well-signed and comprehensive and sometimes encompassing up to eight different recycling and re-use streams, such as clothes, small appliances, footwear, soft plastic packaging and furniture. These systems provide multidimensional educational support, including onsite waste champions who help everything to go where it should. These are popular programs that greatly improve recycling outcomes, and the Victorian government should support this approach across the state. All residential buildings over a certain size should be required to develop an extensive recycling suite, including resident education. A support fund for coordinated implementation in partnership with local government would go a long way, and Victoria could even require developers to put up the funds. Funding will be important, and this burden should not be placed on local government. Victorians want to recycle, so we should help Victorians to do it properly no matter where they live.

#### **Early childhood funding**

**Gary MAAS** (Narre Warren South) (19:17): (1008) The adjournment matter I wish to raise is for the Minister for Children in the other place and concerns the 2024–25 Building Blocks inclusion grants program. The action that I seek is that the minister provide further information on how the program will help make kindergartens more inclusive for children in my electorate of Narre Warren South. The Allan Labor government continues to invest in the wellbeing and education of our children, and we know that kids have diverse needs and do not all learn and play in the same way. By investing in projects that make early learning safer and more inclusive, our youngest Victorians have the best

opportunity to grow and to thrive. It was really terrific to hear that the recipients of the Building Blocks grants included services in my electorate of Narre Warren South. Narre Warren South is a growing community that many young families now call their home, so it was really terrific that some funding would be received. Early childhood education is so important for a good start in life, and I am thrilled to be a part of government that is taking steps to ensure that our youngest students and their families get the support they need. I look forward to sharing the minister's response with my community.

### **Stratford-Maffra Road speed zones**

**Tim BULL** (Gippsland East) (19:18): (1009) My adjournment is for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety, and the action that I am seeking is for the minister to instruct her transport department to adhere to its own speed zone policies around community consultation. This follows yet another PR disaster, with the lowering of speed limits on the Stratford-Maffra Road, a straight stretch of road of around 5 kilometres with farmland either side. When I raised this issue with the regional office, I was told broader consultation is not typically undertaken for speed zone changes. This is in direct contradiction with the department's speed zoning policy, and I will just pull out a couple of excerpts from it. It says that as part of considerations to change speed zones community engagement is conducted:

... to understand the community's views and explain the reasoning behind speed limit change decisions.

This did not occur. It also says:

When determining or changing a speed limit, engagement with affected communities and road users shall be undertaken.

Engagement is important to gauge the level of support that the community and the road users have ...

If it is important, why didn't it happen? It did not happen.

It also says in this policy that if a significant change is proposed in an arterial road, which Stratford-Maffra Road is, consultation needs to be expanded to include affected road users, businesses and others who may be impacted. This did not occur.

I have since learned of other changes with no consultation with business representative groups, chambers of commerce and road users, and the policy says this should occur. I was told by the department that Wellington shire was supportive. This is not accurate. Wellington shire said that it wished for community consultation to be undertaken, but it did not occur. No freight, bus or truck companies were contacted. Why not? The policy says that affected road users will be contacted, as well as businesses. These companies are both road users and businesses – not contacted.

All the new signs have been pushed over by angry motorists, and while I do not condone this, it is a symptom of not consulting and not bringing the community with you. I would like the department to revisit this decision on this road by undertaking the consultation it should have undertaken in the first place. I am sure the minister has enough on her plate with the state of the roads, but I request that she direct her department to follow its own policy, properly consult community and have public forums when changes are proposed for major arterials.

### **Central Avenue–Point Cook Road, Altona Meadows**

**Mathew HILAKARI** (Point Cook) (19:21): (1010) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Transport Infrastructure, and the action that I seek is for the minister to join me at the intersection of Central Avenue and Point Cook Road. This pivotal intersection serves the communities of Altona Meadows, Seabrook and Point Cook. 28,000 vehicles use it every day. It is dangerous and it is congested, and that is why we are getting rid of it. I am very pleased to say that we have undertaken community consultation. We are finding all those dastardly pipes and connections under the road – one of those complex matters that is a struggle for every growing community – and then we are getting underway. The Premier, when she was minister, joined me there straight after the budget. I believe it

was her first visit after the budget. We know the commitment of this government to improving this intersection and getting that work underway, so I look forward to the minister joining me.

### Responses

**Natalie SULEYMAN** (St Albans – Minister for Veterans, Minister for Small Business and Employment, Minister for Youth) (19:22): The member for South-West Coast raised a matter for the attention of the Minister for Emergency Services to meet with the member and discuss voluntary emergency services and clarify Emergency Services and Volunteers Fund funding for volunteer organisations. The member for Cranbourne raised a matter for the attention of the Minister for Police, and the action the member seeks is an update on how Victoria Police are working hard to ensure the Cranbourne community are safe. The member for Gippsland South raised a matter for the attention of the Minister for Energy and Resources, and the action the member seeks is a decision from the minister on offshore wind matters. The member for Mordialloc raised a matter for the attention of the Minister for Transport Infrastructure, and the action the member seeks is that he receives an update on the level crossing works at Mordialloc and Aspendale.

The member for Narracan raised a matter for the attention of the Minister for Transport Infrastructure, and the action the member seeks is further information from the minister regarding the Gippsland line. The member for Kororoit raised a matter for the attention of the Minister for Roads and Road Safety, and the action the member seeks is for the minister to explore temporary measures to improve traffic flow and safety as the Allan Labor government delivers road upgrades across the Kororoit electorate. The member for Brunswick raised a matter for the attention of the Minister for Environment, and the action the member seeks is that there is implementation of high-quality recycling initiatives specifically for apartments.

The member for Narre Warren South raised a matter for the attention of the Minister for Children, and the action the member seeks is that there is further information on how the Allan Labor government's Building Blocks inclusion grants are delivering for Narre Warren South's local kinders and for their littlest learners. The member for Gippsland East raised a matter for the attention of the Minister for Roads and Road Safety, and the action the member seeks is for the department to be made aware of the rules and regulations and to revisit the road in question with more community consultation. The member for Point Cook raised a matter for the attention of the Minister for Transport Infrastructure, and the action the member seeks is for the minister to join the member at the Central Avenue–Point Cook Road intersection to see firsthand the progress and the impact of the Big Build works in his electorate.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** I note the member for Cranbourne's question was directed to the Minister for Police in his capacity as the Minister for Community Safety.

The house stands adjourned till tomorrow.

**House adjourned 7:25 pm.**