

PARLIAMENT OF VICTORIA

**PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES
(HANSARD)**

**LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
FIFTY-NINTH PARLIAMENT
FIRST SESSION**

TUESDAY, 30 AUGUST 2022

hansard.parliament.vic.gov.au

By authority of the Victorian Government Printer

The Governor

The Honourable LINDA DESSAU AC

The Lieutenant-Governor

The Honourable JAMES ANGUS AO

The ministry

Premier	The Hon. DM Andrews MP
Deputy Premier, Minister for Transport Infrastructure, Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop and Minister for Commonwealth Games Delivery	The Hon. JM Allan MP
Attorney-General and Minister for Emergency Services	The Hon. J Symes MLC
Minister for Training and Skills, Minister for Higher Education and Minister for Agriculture	The Hon. GA Tierney MLC
Treasurer, Minister for Economic Development, Minister for Industrial Relations and Minister for Trade	The Hon. TH Pallas MP
Minister for Planning	The Hon. EA Blandthorn MP
Minister for Child Protection and Family Services and Minister for Disability, Ageing and Carers	The Hon. CW Brooks MP
Minister for Police, Minister for Crime Prevention and Minister for Racing	The Hon. AR Carbines MP
Minister for Public Transport, Minister for Roads and Road Safety, Minister for Industry Support and Recovery and Minister for Business Precincts	The Hon. BA Carroll MP
Minister for Energy, Minister for Environment and Climate Action and Minister for Solar Homes	The Hon. L D’Ambrosio MP
Minister for Tourism, Sport and Major Events and Minister for Creative Industries	The Hon. S Dimopoulos MP
Minister for Ports and Freight, Minister for Consumer Affairs, Gaming and Liquor Regulation, Minister for Local Government and Minister for Suburban Development	The Hon. MM Horne MP
Minister for Education and Minister for Women	The Hon. NM Hutchins MP
Minister for Corrections, Minister for Youth Justice, Minister for Victim Support and Minister for Fishing and Boating	The Hon. S Kilkenny MP
Minister for Commonwealth Games Legacy and Minister for Veterans ..	The Hon. SL Leane MLC
Assistant Treasurer, Minister for Regulatory Reform, Minister for Government Services and Minister for Housing	The Hon. DJ Pearson MP
Minister for Employment, Minister for Innovation, Medical Research and the Digital Economy, Minister for Small Business and Minister for Resources	The Hon. JL Pulford MLC
Minister for Water, Minister for Regional Development and Minister for Equality	The Hon. H Shing MLC
Minister for Multicultural Affairs, Minister for Prevention of Family Violence, Minister for Community Sport and Minister for Youth	The Hon. RL Spence MP
Minister for Workplace Safety and Minister for Early Childhood and Pre-Prep	The Hon. I Stitt MLC
Minister for Health and Minister for Ambulance Services	The Hon. M Thomas MP
Minister for Mental Health and Minister for Treaty and First Peoples ...	The Hon. G Williams MP
Cabinet Secretary	Mr SJ McGhie MP

**OFFICE-HOLDERS OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
FIFTY-NINTH PARLIAMENT—FIRST SESSION**

Speaker

The Hon. JM EDWARDS

Deputy Speaker

Ms N SULEYMAN

Acting Speakers

Mr Blackwood, Mr J Bull, Ms Connolly, Ms Couzens, Ms Crugnale, Mr Edbrooke, Ms Halfpenny, Mr McCurdy, Mr McGuire, Mr Morris, Ms Richards, Mr Richardson, Mr Taylor and Ms Ward

Leader of the Parliamentary Labor Party and Premier

The Hon. DM ANDREWS

Deputy Leader of the Parliamentary Labor Party and Deputy Premier

The Hon. JM ALLAN

Leader of the Parliamentary Liberal Party and Leader of the Opposition

The Hon. MJ GUY

Deputy Leader of the Parliamentary Liberal Party

Mr DJ SOUTHWICK

Leader of The Nationals and Deputy Leader of the Opposition

The Hon. PL WALSH

Deputy Leader of The Nationals

Ms E KEALY

Leader of the House

Ms EA BLANDTHORN

Manager of Opposition Business

Ms LE STALEY

Heads of parliamentary departments

Assembly: Clerk of the Legislative Assembly: Ms B Noonan

Council: Clerk of the Parliaments and Clerk of the Legislative Council: Mr A Young

Parliamentary Services: Secretary: Ms T Burrows

MEMBERS OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
FIFTY-NINTH PARLIAMENT—FIRST SESSION

Member	District	Party	Member	District	Party
Addison, Ms Juliana	Wendouree	ALP	Maas, Mr Gary	Narre Warren South	ALP
Allan, Ms Jacinta Marie	Bendigo East	ALP	McCurdy, Mr Timothy Logan	Ovens Valley	Nats
Andrews, Mr Daniel Michael	Mulgrave	ALP	McGhie, Mr Stephen John	Melton	ALP
Angus, Mr Neil Andrew Warwick	Forest Hill	LP	McGuire, Mr Frank	Broadmeadows	ALP
Battin, Mr Bradley William	Gembrook	LP	McLeish, Ms Lucinda Gaye	Eildon	LP
Blackwood, Mr Gary John	Narracan	LP	Merlino, Mr James Anthony	Monbulk	ALP
Blandthorn, Ms Elizabeth Anne	Pascoe Vale	ALP	Morris, Mr David Charles	Mornington	LP
Brayne, Mr Chris	Nepean	ALP	Neville, Ms Lisa Mary	Bellarine	ALP
Britnell, Ms Roma	South-West Coast	LP	Newbury, Mr James	Brighton	LP
Brooks, Mr Colin William	Bundoora	ALP	Northe, Mr Russell John	Morwell	Ind
Bull, Mr Joshua Michael	Sunbury	ALP	O'Brien, Mr Daniel David	Gippsland South	Nats
Bull, Mr Timothy Owen	Gippsland East	Nats	O'Brien, Mr Michael Anthony	Malvern	LP
Burgess, Mr Neale Ronald	Hastings	LP	Pakula, Mr Martin Philip	Keysborough	ALP
Carbines, Mr Anthony Richard	Ivanhoe	ALP	Pallas, Mr Timothy Hugh	Werribee	ALP
Carroll, Mr Benjamin Alan	Niddrie	ALP	Pearson, Mr Daniel James	Essendon	ALP
Cheeseman, Mr Darren Leicester	South Barwon	ALP	Read, Dr Tim	Brunswick	Greens
Connolly, Ms Sarah	Tarneit	ALP	Richardson, Ms Pauline	Cranbourne	ALP
Couzens, Ms Christine Anne	Geelong	ALP	Richardson, Mr Timothy Noel	Mordialloc	ALP
Crugnale, Ms Jordan Alessandra	Bass	ALP	Riordan, Mr Richard Vincent	Polwarth	LP
Cupper, Ms Ali	Mildura	Ind	Rowswell, Mr Brad	Sandringham	LP
D'Ambrosio, Ms Liliana	Mill Park	ALP	Ryan, Stephanie Maureen	Euroa	Nats
Dimopoulos, Mr Stephen	Oakleigh	ALP	Sandell, Ms Ellen	Melbourne	Greens
Donnellan, Mr Luke Anthony	Narre Warren North	ALP	Scott, Mr Robin David	Preston	ALP
Edbrooke, Mr Paul Andrew	Frankston	ALP	Settle, Ms Michaela	Buninyong	ALP
Edwards, Ms Janice Maree	Bendigo West	ALP	Sheed, Ms Suzanna	Shepparton	Ind
Eren, Mr John Hamdi	Lara	ALP	Smith, Mr Ryan	Warrandyte	LP
Foley, Mr Martin Peter	Albert Park	ALP	Smith, Mr Timothy Colin	Kew	LP
Fowles, Mr Will	Burwood	ALP	Southwick, Mr David James	Caulfield	LP
Fregon, Mr Matt	Mount Waverley	ALP	Spence, Ms Rosalind Louise	Yuroke	ALP
Green, Ms Danielle Louise	Yan Yean	ALP	Staikos, Mr Nicholas	Bentleigh	ALP
Guy, Mr Matthew Jason	Bulleen	LP	Staley, Ms Louise Eileen	Ripon	LP
Halfpenny, Ms Bronwyn	Thomastown	ALP	Suleyman, Ms Natalie	St Albans	ALP
Hall, Ms Katie	Footscray	ALP	Tak, Mr Meng Heang	Clarinda	ALP
Halse, Mr Dustin	Ringwood	ALP	Taylor, Mr Jackson	Bayswater	ALP
Hamer, Mr Paul	Box Hill	ALP	Theophanous, Ms Katerina	Northcote	ALP
Hennessy, Ms Jill	Altona	ALP	Thomas, Ms Mary-Anne	Macedon	ALP
Hibbins, Mr Samuel Peter	Prahran	Greens	Tilley, Mr William John	Benambra	LP
Hodgett, Mr David John	Croydon	LP	Vallence, Ms Bridget	Evelyn	LP
Horne, Ms Melissa Margaret	Williamstown	ALP	Wakeling, Mr Nicholas	Ferntree Gully	LP
Hutchins, Ms Natalie Maree Sykes	Sydenham	ALP	Walsh, Mr Peter Lindsay	Murray Plains	Nats
Kairouz, Ms Marlene	Kororoit	ALP	Ward, Ms Vicki	Eltham	ALP
Kealy, Ms Emma Jayne	Lowan	Nats	Wells, Mr Kimberley Arthur	Rowville	LP
Kennedy, Mr John Ormond	Hawthorn	ALP	Williams, Ms Gabrielle	Dandenong	ALP
Kilkenny, Ms Sonya	Carrum	ALP	Wynne, Mr Richard William	Richmond	ALP

PARTY ABBREVIATIONS

ALP—Labor Party; Greens—The Greens;
Ind—Independent; LP—Liberal Party; Nats—The Nationals.

Legislative Assembly committees

Economy and Infrastructure Standing Committee

Ms Addison, Mr Blackwood, Ms Couzens, Mr Eren, Ms Ryan, Ms Theophanous and Mr Wakeling.

Environment and Planning Standing Committee

Ms Addison, Mr Fowles, Ms Green, Mr Hamer, Mr McCurdy, Ms McLeish and Mr Morris.

Legal and Social Issues Standing Committee

Mr Angus, Mr Battin, Ms Couzens, Ms Kealy, Ms Settle, Ms Theophanous and Mr Tak.

Privileges Committee

Mr Allan, Mr Carroll, Ms Hennessy, Mr McGuire, Mr Morris, Mr Pakula, Ms Ryan, Ms Staley and Mr Wells.

Standing Orders Committee

The Speaker, Ms Blandthorn, Mr Fregon, Ms McLeish, Ms Settle, Ms Sheed, Ms Staley, Ms Suleyman and Mr Walsh.

Joint committees

Dispute Resolution Committee

Assembly: Ms Allan, Ms Hennessy, Mr Merlino, Mr Pakula, Mr R Smith, Mr Walsh and Mr Wells.

Council: Mr Bourman, Ms Crozier, Mr Davis, Ms Symes and Ms Tierney.

Electoral Matters Committee

Assembly: Ms Hall, Dr Read and Mr Rowswell.

Council: Mr Erdogan, Mrs McArthur, Mr Meddick, Mr Melhem, Ms Lovell, Mr Quilty and Mr Tarlamis.

House Committee

Assembly: The Speaker (*ex officio*), Mr T Bull, Ms Crugnale, Mr Fregon, Ms Sandell, Ms Staley and Ms Suleyman.

Council: The President (*ex officio*), Mr Bourman, Mr Davis, Mr Leane, Ms Lovell and Ms Stitt.

Integrity and Oversight Committee

Assembly: Mr Halse, Mr Maas, Mr Rowswell, Mr Taylor, Ms Ward and Mr Wells.

Council: Mr Grimley.

Pandemic Declaration Accountability and Oversight Committee

Assembly: Mr J Bull, Mr Eren, Ms Kealy, Mr Sheed, Ms Ward and Mr Wells.

Council: Ms Crozier and Mr Erdogan.

Public Accounts and Estimates Committee

Assembly: Ms Connolly, Mr Hibbins, Mr Maas, Mr Newbury, Mr D O'Brien, Ms Richards and Mr Richardson.

Council: Mrs McArthur and Ms Taylor.

Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee

Assembly: Mr Burgess, Ms Connolly and Mr Morris.

Council: Ms Patten and Ms Watt.

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Tuesday, 30 August 2022

The SPEAKER (Ms JM Edwards) took the chair at 12.03 pm and read the prayer.

Announcements

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

The SPEAKER (12:04): We acknowledge the traditional Aboriginal owners of the land on which we are meeting. We pay our respects to them, their culture, their elders past, present and future, and elders from other communities who may be here today.

Business of the house

ORDERS OF THE DAY

The SPEAKER (12:04): General business, orders of the day 1, will be removed from the notice paper unless the member wishing their matter to remain advises the Clerk in writing before 5.00 pm today.

Petitions

Following petitions presented to house by Clerk:

HEIDELBERG-KINGLAKE ROAD

This petition of residents in Victoria draws to the attention of the Legislative Assembly the hazards on Heidelberg-Kinglake Road between St Andrews and Kinglake when used by vehicles over 4.5 tonne. This road is a narrow winding road with lanes currently below standard of 2.4 metres. The structure of the road is unstable with no safety barriers and many blind corners, making it extremely hazardous for all road users on a daily basis, including cyclists. Along with multiple motorcycle fatalities, it has also been subject to numerous car vs truck accidents. Currently all vehicles are sent via this route by GPS, resulting in truck drivers becoming stuck and fearful due to the narrow road. Once on the road there is nowhere for truck drivers to turn off and therefore have to continue for 12kms, coming across motorists and cyclists who have, in most instances, had to stop, reverse, have hit the embankment or end up over the edge of an extremely steep embankment to allow the truck to pass. Numerous vehicles are visible over the edge of the road that cannot be recovered due to the terrain.

The petitioners therefore request that the Legislative Assembly:

- * Prohibit Heidelberg-Kinglake Road in the Shires Of Nillumbik and Murrindindi from St Andrews and Kinglake being used as a truck route for vehicles over 4.5 tonne
- * Install flashing warning lights in St Andrews and Kinglake townships before the roads entrance with added installation of a truck and large vehicle turning area at both ends
- * Withdrawal of permits for large vehicles to use this route (except for emergency usage, such as bushfire, accidents)

By Ms McLEISH (Eildon) (136 signatures).

VICTORIAN BLUE OCEAN SAFETY SKILLS CENTRE

This petition of residents in Victoria draws to the attention of the Legislative Assembly the need to urgently support building a dedicated ocean safety awareness centre that focuses on cutting the State's rising toll of deaths by drowning via educating Victorian secondary school students and community groups in vital ocean safety skills. The Victorian Blue Ocean Safety Skills Centre (VBOSS) based in Apollo Bay midway along the Great Ocean Road, the busiest ocean tourism corridor in Australia, will be Victoria's first dedicated ocean safety and awareness centre, training more than 3000 Victorian secondary school students a year as well as community groups. It is a community driven initiative actively supported by Life Saving Victoria, Great Ocean Road Health, Colac Otway Shire Council, all sides of politics, and the State's multi-cultural communities. A record number of people drowned in Victoria last year and historically, we know people from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds are five times more likely to drown, making up a third of drowning fatalities in Victoria each year. VBOSS will be a platform for people from all of Victoria's diverse multicultural communities to take part in ocean safety and awareness training programs.

The petitioners request that the Legislative Assembly require relevant Departments to financially support the development of Victorian Blue Ocean Safety Skills Centre (VBOSS), comprising the redevelopment of the Apollo Bay Surf Life Saving Club and the construction of multipurpose group accommodation at Apollo Bay P-12 College. VBOSS will create more than 70 jobs and contribute more than \$35 million to regional Victoria during its construction and development. After the initial capital investment of \$15.4 million, across both sites, VBOSS will be self-sustaining in terms of revenue. Importantly, the state-of-the-art facilities will also be capable of being utilised as a refuge in the event of a fire or natural disaster in the Great Ocean Road region.

By Mr RIORDAN (Polwarth) (783 signatures).

VICTORIAN BLUE OCEAN SAFETY SKILLS CENTRE

To the Legislative Assembly of Victoria. This petition draws the attention of the House to call on the Daniel Andrews Government to support the proposal for the **Victorian Blue Ocean Safety Centre (VBOSS)** with financial support and backing of the redevelopment of the Apollo Bay Surf Life Saving Club and the necessary multipurpose group accommodation centre at the Apollo Bay P-12 College.

By Mr RIORDAN (Polwarth) (302 signatures).

Tabled.

Ordered that petition lodged by member for Eildon be considered next day on motion of Ms McLEISH (Eildon).

Ordered that petitions lodged by member for Polwarth be considered next day on motion of Mr RIORDAN (Polwarth).

Committees

PUBLIC ACCOUNTS AND ESTIMATES COMMITTEE

Report on the 2022–23 Budget Estimates

End of Term Report for the 59th Parliament

Ms CONNOLLY (Tarneit) (12:06): I have the honour to present to the house two reports from the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee: the report on the 2022–23 budget estimates, together with the transcripts of evidence and a minority report, and the end-of-term report for the 59th Parliament, together with appendices.

Ordered that reports, minority report and appendices be published.

SCRUTINY OF ACTS AND REGULATIONS COMMITTEE

Alert Digest No. 12

Ms CONNOLLY (Tarneit) (12:07): I have the honour to present a report from the Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee, being *Alert Digest No. 12* of 2022, on the following bills:

Energy Legislation Amendment (Transition from Coal) Bill 2022

Human Source Management Bill 2022

Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission Amendment (Restoration of Powers) Bill 2022

Land Amendment (Accessing Licensed Water Frontages) Bill 2022

together with appendices.

Ordered to be published.

Documents

DOCUMENTS

Incorporated list as follows:

DOCUMENTS TABLED UNDER ACTS OF PARLIAMENT—The Clerk tabled the following documents under Acts of Parliament:

Crown Land (Reserves) Act 1978:

Orders under s 17B granting licences over:

Albert Park

Kings Domain Reserve and Alexandra Park Reserve

Treasury Gardens, Alexandra Gardens, Kings Domain Reserve and Parliament Gardens

Order under s 17D granting a lease over Point Leo Foreshore Reserve

Interpretation of Legislation Act 1984—Notices under s 32(3)(a)(iii) in relation to:

Guidelines for Assessing Fitness to Drive (*Gazette S415, 19 August 2022*)

Statutory Rule 61—Notice of Incorporation of Material and Address for Inspection of Documents (*Gazette G33, 18 August 2022*)

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

Ballarat—C227

Brimbank—C234

Horsham—C79

Melton—C208

Moreland—C222

Northern Grampians—C61

Port Phillip—C183

Queenscliffe—C36

Stonnington—C322

Statutory Rules under the following Acts:

Alpine Resorts (Management) Act 1997—SR 67

Commercial Passenger Vehicle Industry Act 2017—SR 66

Crown Land (Reserves) Act 1978—SR 62

Electoral Act 2002—SR 68

Forests Act 1958—SR 63

Gas Safety Act 1997—SR 64

Subordinate Legislation Act 1994—SR 65

Supreme Court Act 1986—SR 69

Subordinate Legislation Act 1994:

Documents under s 15 in relation to Statutory Rules 57, 62, 63, 68, 69

Documents under s 16B in relation to the *Land Tax Act 2005*—Guidelines for rooming house exemption under s 75

Victorian Electoral Commission—Report to Parliament on the 2021 South Gippsland Shire Council general election

Victorian Environmental Assessment Council—Assessment of the values of the Strathbogie Ranges and Mirboo North Immediate Protection Areas (3 documents).

PROCLAMATIONS—Under Standing Order 177A, the Clerk tabled the following proclamations fixing operative dates:

Gambling and Liquor Legislation Amendment Act 2022—Part 2 (other than Division 1), Part 3 (other than Divisions 1 and 3), Part 4 (other than ss 146(3), 147, 148, 149 and 155) and Part 5—1 September 2022 (*Gazette S422, 23 August 2022*)

Victorian Collaborative Centre for Mental Health and Wellbeing Act 2021—Whole Act other than s 11(7) and (8)—1 September 2022 (*Gazette S422, 23 August 2022*)

Workplace Injury Rehabilitation and Compensation Amendment (Arbitration) Act 2021—Whole Act—1 September 2022 (*Gazette S422, 23 August 2022*).

Announcements

COMMISSION TO ADMINISTER OATH OR AFFIRMATION TO MEMBERS

The SPEAKER (12:08): I have received a commission from the Governor to administer the oath or affirmation to members, given on 19 August 2022.

Bills

CRIMES LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL 2022

Council's agreement

The SPEAKER (12:09): I have received a message from the Legislative Council agreeing to the Crimes Legislation Amendment Bill 2022 without amendment.

MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING BILL 2022

Council's amendments

The SPEAKER (12:09): I have received a message from the Legislative Council agreeing to the Mental Health and Wellbeing Bill 2022 with amendments.

Ms BLANDTHORN (Pascoe Vale—Leader of the House, Minister for Planning) (12:09): I move:

That the amendments be taken into consideration immediately.

Ms STALEY (Ripon) (12:09): What we have got here are some amendments coming back from the Council. There are quite a number of these amendments. I believe that we are just seeing them now. We do not know exactly what they are. They have come back from the Council and the government is choosing to take them into consideration immediately. I have had some conversations with the Leader of the House, and I requested that in fact we do them in about an hour's time, partly to give us the opportunity to have a look at them but also because it would then mean that the day will flow better. But we have got an inexperienced Leader of the House who is now bringing them on immediately when it actually is just going to cause chaos.

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Order!

Ms STALEY: There is no need to do this and no need to ride roughshod yet again over members of the opposition and those on this side of the Parliament, who have not seen what these amendments are. We should be given the right to see what these amendments are before we are required to take them into consideration. I note as soon as I stand up those on the other side are yelling me down. Their only approach in this place is to yell across the chamber, apparently, whenever I and others, particularly women, stand up on this side. It is just a pattern of behaviour that goes on all the time—all the time. And as for the whip, the member for Buninyong—well out of order, I would have thought.

All we are asking for is a small amount of time to see what these amendments are. My understanding is that one of them is an amendment we moved to the bill, so—guess what—we are probably going to support that one. But the others—I do not know what they are, and so we should be given the right to

find out and have just a small amount of time. But once again we have a government that just thinks, 'Oh, no, we'll come in and we'll do them immediately'. The Leader of the House, who was not the Leader of the House when this last happened, might be reminded that there was a very small amendment that was made to a forestry bill, and I managed to speak on that amendment—I believe all it did was change one date to another—for half an hour. I did so, and then there were other speakers from the coalition, the Liberals and Nationals, who also spoke on that amendment because it was an important amendment. We certainly needed to ventilate all the issues around that amendment.

This time around I suspect there will be even greater issues because it is not just doing one date; there are many other words on this paper. I have yet to read what they are. They are only just now being brought into consideration, so we should be given the opportunity to see what these amendments are, to consider our position and to have the Shadow Minister for Mental Health, who will no doubt speak eloquently on whatever is put in front of her because she is up to speed on her portfolio, speak. But that does not come across—the real problem here is once again the government thinks it can just play games and ride roughshod over openness, transparency and proper procedure because they can—because they have the numbers in this place.

There was no need to bring these amendments on right now. Instead of immediately it could have been later this day, and later this day could have been in an hour's time or so. Instead we are going through all of this because of the Leader of the House. I did put this to her, and she did not actually come back and say, 'Oh, you're wrong in theory'. It was just, 'No, we're not doing that'. I did ask. It is not as if we did not ask for this. But the arrogance of this government is once again on display. At every opportunity they are there to just ride roughshod. I assume the assumption was that we would not speak on these amendments. Well, I will advise the government that not only will we have a lead speaker, we will have other speakers on this, and we will now have possibly several hours of debate on these amendments. So I say to the Leader of the House and to the government: you reap what you sow when you come and you do these things against agreement when agreement was so easy to achieve. So, as I say, we oppose these immediately, and we will be voting against this procedure.

Mr RICHARDSON (Mordialloc) (12:14): What an extraordinary performance this is by the opposition. Who would have thought that they are so disconnected in their party room that they are now disconnected from the Council on basic things that were agreed to and worked through in the Council. Such is the division, such is the lack of organisation on that side, that we now see that they do not even tune into what other members in the other place of their own party and their own representation have put forward. To suggest that there is care and consideration from the lead speaker on this is truly extraordinary. They have been dragged by the public, by this Parliament, kicking and screaming to support this bill—kicking and screaming—knowing that if they opposed it, they would leave a \$3.7 billion hole in mental health. They have had a bet each way on this. We have had the Leader of the Opposition oppose the mental health and wellbeing levy that would drastically impact on communities throughout Victoria.

Ms Staley: On a point of order, Speaker, this is a narrow procedural debate on the question of whether we take the amendments into consideration immediately or at some other point. I would ask you to ask the member to restrict himself to the procedural motion.

The SPEAKER: I do ask the member to come back to the procedural motion that we are debating.

Mr RICHARDSON: The point I am going to—while the lead speaker mentioned forestry of all things—is that the hour that the member is asking for will not decouple from the fact that they have worked on these amendments in the upper house, they have worked them through, and they understand what was brought forward. I assume they were in the Parliament during that debate or that they had checked out those amendments and checked out the things that we agreed to and how it has come back to the Legislative Assembly. These are just stalling tactics from a desperate opposition who never supported this bill, the Mental Health and Wellbeing Bill 2022, and were taken kicking and screaming to this point in time. The notion that an hour changes a deeply dysfunctional, demoralised opposition is

an absolute furphy. Let us bring it on now. They are divided, they are disconnected—from opposition rooms all the way through, it appears, to the Council—in bringing these amendments forward.

We are getting on with the job of moving these amendments to this historic bill, which is the most important legislation—arguably the most important legislation—which will save lives and change the outcomes for Victorians in the future. The notion that an hour changes the dysfunction that they have brought to this place, the dysfunction from the Legislative Council—do any of the speakers want to get up and describe what they do not know about what their other members of Parliament were up to? We know that they change from time to time who will be the lead speaker on a particular issue day to day, but give us a bit of a sense of what the difference in—

Ms Kealy: On a point of order, Speaker, this is a very narrow debate. It is about these amendments that have been brought before the house. It is not a time to criticise. I therefore ask you to bring the member back to the point that we are debating right now.

The SPEAKER: I ask the member to come back to the matter before the house.

Mr RICHARDSON: It is amazing that it is not a time to criticise but the lead speaker says ‘reap what you sow’. That is a very interesting contradiction. Maybe The Nationals and Liberals again are at polar opposites in this place. This is just another stunt, with two sitting weeks to go, opposing some really important work that is coming forward in the mental health and wellbeing space. I would just love to know from those opposite what 3600 seconds changes in the way that they have approached this bill and the work that has been done to this point. All Victorians know where people stand on mental health and wellbeing and the support that we are bringing to this community. So let us bring on the debate. Let us have a chat.

When you look at how many speakers from that side spoke during the debate on the bill—I mean, they ran dead for how long?—barely anyone spoke from that side, and now they are really concerned about amendments. No-one fronted up. They did not even exhaust their list, and now they are coming in and saying that they care about amendments. They could not even front up enough people to speak on the Mental Health and Wellbeing Bill.

Ms KEALY (Lowan) (12:18): I speak in support of the Manager of Opposition Business. Absolutely there is no doubt that we should not be debating this immediately. We have put forward a very, very straightforward request that we are given an hour to look over these amendments and ensure that we are completely across them and are putting forward a strong position from the Liberals and Nationals. I will take up some of the comments that were made by the previous speaker. It is completely untrue and just politicising mental health—which has to be one of the most disgraceful things you could ever do—to even contemplate that we were against the Mental Health and Wellbeing Bill 2022. We supported it, and we went through that in very considered detail. In fact it would have been very good if the government had stepped forward and supported our amendment—we will be looking forward to debate later today—which was around making specific reference to the alcohol and other drugs sector in relation to the obligations of the bill. Now, if the government had in fact listened and adhered to what we were putting forward to improve the Mental Health and Wellbeing Bill and to make sure that the alcohol and other drugs sector had security in its funding and was specifically referenced as being part of the Mental Health and Wellbeing Bill—

Ms Blandthorn: On a point of order, Speaker, we have had numerous points of order this morning about remaining relevant to the procedural motion rather than the substance of the bill or the amendments, and I would ask that the member be kept to the procedural motion.

The SPEAKER: I ask the member for Lowan to come back to the procedural motion.

Ms KEALY: I am more than happy to speak to that because it is important that these amendments are given proper consideration so that we can debate them in full. The Liberals and Nationals have not asked for anything extraordinary. It was put to us that we were looking to hold back the passing of the

Mental Health and Wellbeing Bill. There is nothing more ridiculous that I have heard in this place. We are asking for an additional hour to look over these amendments that have been brought forward in the Legislative Council to ensure that they are well thought through, that there are no further errors in them and that we are able to properly represent the views of the people who are in our electorate and the views of the mental health and wellbeing sector to ensure that their points are brought to this house, because we have seen that on some occasions that proper opportunity—time to consult with our stakeholders—has not been given to us.

The government does not always get legislation right, so it is very, very important that we make sure that we are given the opportunity as the opposition and as crossbenchers to scrutinise legislation that is put before the house, and that includes amendments that are brought before the house. So I strongly support that we have greater time to be able to look over these amendments and to get a full briefing, and while it might only be an hour—it has already been put to us that that is an extraordinarily long period of time; ‘Why on earth would we want an extra hour’—to think that that additional period of time would be a critical failure of this government in being able to pass this Mental Health and Wellbeing Bill is nothing short of complete and utter codswallop. It is just basically the government wanting to further stifle debate, to further stifle scrutiny, to further stifle the voice of Victorians who are deeply concerned with some of the legislation that is put through this place and to further stifle our opportunity to put forward good ideas that sometimes the government do take on.

It would have been nice—and we would not have had to have this debate today—had the government supported our amendment when we put it in the Legislative Assembly just a couple of weeks ago. We would not be in this position where we have this legislation coming back from the Legislative Council, and so this debate would have been completely needless. We would not be, as has been put forward by Labor MPs, wasting our time on this frivolous matter. It is not a frivolous matter. These are key amendments that should be properly considered, not just by the Legislative Council but by this chamber and by every single member, and that does not just include the Liberals and Nationals, it includes the crossbenchers as well. It includes members of the Labor Party who may want that additional time to speak to people in their electorate to see how these amendments would impact upon them, particularly given the great impact of lockdowns and restrictions on people’s mental health right across Victoria.

So I urge the government to reconsider and to provide a simple, additional 60 minutes so that we can properly prepare for this debate, ensure that we put forward the views of all Victorians in this chamber and ensure that stakeholders are properly informed—we do get those last-minute phone calls and emails that come through—to ensure that the community is actually in support of these amendments, that there are not any problems in any of them and that the community do support them as part of rebuilding Victoria’s mental health system. It is not unusual to do that. It is not untoward. We do not want the government running roughshod over the opposition, who are trying to bring forward very good points here to improve legislation. It is what we have been able to do with this amendment, so I strongly recommend it, and I provide support for the Manager of Opposition Business.

Mr FOWLES (Burwood) (12:23): 250 hours since the Legislative Council was last sitting—250 hours—and here we are in this chamber with this confected outrage about a further hour of consideration required. Those opposite have suggested with all this confected outrage that they need this additional hour to consult with their stakeholders. Well, what a load of nonsense. They have had 250 hours to get this consultation done, and they think the last hour is going to make the difference. They are doing their homework on the bus on the way to school. They went out partying all weekend. They are doing their homework on the bus on the way to school. It is absolute nonsense, absolute codswallop, and all it does is seek to draw attention once again to the political games and carry-on going on on that side of the chamber, just again playing games in another round of political game playing with no view of the bigger picture and no view of the importance of these mental health reforms, which once again they are seeking to wriggle around and walk away from.

So there we have it: stakeholder consultation. They need an hour. They say, 'We haven't used the 250 or 260 hours since the Legislative Council passed the amendments. No, we want to use this 1 hour whilst we are sitting to get all of our stakeholder consultation done'. It is just complete nonsense. It is a confection, and it is simply an exercise in them wasting a bit of time in the chamber and carrying on and jumping on their high horse. This is exactly the sort of stuff that drives the punters wild—you know, this stupid game playing. It just drives people bonkers. Everyone can see through it. It is such a facade that those opposite can come in here and complain about an hour when they have had 250 of them to get ready for this thoroughly inconsequential debate on a bunch of amendments. They know it. They absolutely know it. They absolutely know they are wasting the time of this chamber. They are wasting your time, Speaker. They are wasting the time of Victorians, and Victorians are wising up to it. They are clearly wising up to this sort of carry-on, this nonsense, the artifice of 'Oh, deary us. We need another hour. We need another hour to be able to go through these amendments because we haven't used the 250—we don't even know what the amendments are'.

I do not know what is going on in shadow cabinet or if shadow cabinet even meet or, if they do meet, they do so without screaming at one another, but the reality is they have had plenty of opportunity to look through all these amendments—plenty of opportunity because there is a little thing going around this joint called *Hansard*, and I pay tribute to the good folk from *Hansard*. They actually record all the things that go on in this joint and in the other place and, lo and behold, these amendments were of course duly noted, duly recorded and made available to those opposite hundreds of hours ago, yet here we are fanning around. What a load of absolute carry-on that we have to sit here and listen to this drivel, this confectioned outrage about an hour—an hour when they are going to go and do all of their important stakeholder consultation. Whilst they are meant to be doing parliamentary business, at the same time, they are going to get all the stakeholder consultation done in an hour.

Doesn't that speak to the modus operandi of the Liberal and National parties? Because consultation, again, is just a mere flick of the wrist. 'Well, you know, we're not going to fund the mental health system, but we still agree with most of the things that are going on. Are we going to fund it or are we not? Are we going to have a special revenue measure or are we not?'. They cannot make up their own minds. Clearly the left hand is not speaking to the right hand on any given day, because their very colleagues, who sit in the party room, who sit in the same shadow cabinet, have actually litigated all of these amendments already. If they wanted to get briefed on it, they could have used any one of the 260 hours since the Legislative Council last sat. But have they? No, because it is far too much fun to come in here and play these childish, childish games, to fuff about to just try and divert attention from all of their many, many problems.

Right now it is not just those in this chamber but all Victorians who are seeing right through it. What an absolute load of tosh being put up by the members to my right, an absolute load of tosh that we are sitting here debating something as absurd as a 1-hour extension when they have already had 250 hours to complete their homework. You want a one-hour extension. It is an absolute load of twang—a waste of your time and a waste of this house's time.

Ms BRITNELL (South-West Coast) (12:28): I rise to support the Manager of Opposition Business's proposal that we have the opportunity, as is absolutely the right in any debate, to be able to respond. We have just had this come down from the upper house to the Legislative Assembly and there has been absolutely no opportunity for us to actually see the amendments. Yes, I do understand that one of the amendments is ours—and how this government could have left off the glaringly obvious need for the Mental Health and Wellbeing Bill 2022 to have alcohol and drug services in it just shows how ignorant and arrogant this government is—but we have not seen what is in the bill, and that is why I think it is so absolutely arrogant—

Mr Richardson: On a point of order, Speaker, it is quite narrow. I know that people want to go the tonk, but it is quite narrow, this debate. It has just come down from the Council in the last 250 hours, and all the amendments are on the website. They have been there for some time. But it is quite a narrow debate on why the homework has not been done.

Mr Morris: On the point of order, Speaker, there have been repeated allegations in this house that this has been around for 250 hours. The fact is, Speaker, as you know, you just introduced it. So the member is entirely within her rights to make that point.

The SPEAKER: The member has made the point, it has been made several times, but I ask the member to come back to the procedural motion.

Ms BRITNELL: Thank you, Speaker. I will come back to the motion by saying I think it is absolutely arrogant and ignorant of this government to state that they think it is reasonable for us not to have at least even an hour to look properly at the amendments and give that respect to the community that we serve and that we need to communicate with to check whether the things that have been put back in this bill are actually something that the community who work in this environment need. It is just absolutely disgraceful that something as important as the mental health and wellbeing of our community is being pushed forward by this government without that due consideration of debate and respect. The member for Lowan, who does extraordinarily hard work in this space, knows her constituents' needs, but she cannot do it without consultation, because that is what we are here for—to scrutinise, to communicate and to work with the community. The government on the other hand just wants to push things through with no communication, no consideration and no scrutiny, because it thinks it is beyond and above that. Well, this is what you call riding roughshod, not only over the opposition here but over the community, who have worked so hard and who want that opportunity to be heard. To seek advice—is it so difficult for the government to realise that it is an important part of forming legislation to seek advice, to talk to the community and to actually give the community, through the opposition, the opportunity to scrutinise?

An hour is not long to ask. In fact to claim that it is a long time, which I have just heard in this chamber, is nothing short of absurd. To hear words about confected outrage is hypocrisy at its greatest if ever I have heard it. I do not know why the voice of Victorians does not get the right to be heard and how in this Parliament, where we are elected to do exactly that, that can even be debated or put down, which is basically what is happening here. The right of Victorians to have their voices heard is being arrogantly dismissed by a government that has got so arrogant it has forgotten who it is it works for, who it is it is supposed to be listening to and who it is it represents. I urge you to reconsider and think through exactly what you are trying to do here—rush through something and not allow the right for the people's voices to be heard. I just cannot understand why you are talking about stalling tactics and not supporting something as simple as this.

A member interjected.

Ms BRITNELL: No, I do not think it is worth sitting down. I think it is worth hearing the voice of the community—the community who elected me to represent them, the community that have told me from the day I was elected that we have massive problems in our community. This bill has got amendments in it that I want to have the right to be able to see, to study and to communicate to the people who talk to me frequently. So I do not think asking for an hour is at all too much, but you want to sit over there and yell and scream like disrespectful—

The SPEAKER: Order! The member for South-West Coast will not use the term 'you'. You are reflecting on the Chair.

Ms BRITNELL: Sorry, Speaker. You are quite right. I will finish by saying I do support the Manager of Opposition Business asking respectfully for an hour—it is not much to ask—so we can scrutinise what is very important: this bill.

Ms SHEED (Shepparton) (12:33): (*By leave*) I think what we are dealing with here is the processes of the Parliament, and I think we have spoken on those many times in relation to there being no non-government business program and not enough consideration in detail. Today we have an amendment, I understand, to the Mental Health and Wellbeing Bill 2022 which none of us have yet seen. I was admitted to the Supreme Court of Victoria in 1979, and it was my understanding, always, that when

you looked at an amendment you had the act with you so that you could understand what the amendment might be. Now, to not do that as a member of Parliament, as a lawyer, is not to do your job—it is just not doing your job.

All that is being asked for here is a 1-hour period of time to give people the chance to pick up the amendment, to read it through, to compare the amendment to the legislation that is under consideration, to make a judgement and then to vote. Really we are being put in a position here where we are being asked to immediately deal with something that we have not had the chance to look at and consider. I would have to abstain from a vote on an amendment such as this if we do not get the chance to properly consider it. I do not see how we can be expected to do our job properly if we do not do it. Now, it is all very well to say, ‘Ah, the upper house have looked at it, it’s been reviewed’ and all the rest of it, but we are elected to do our own jobs, to look at the legislation on behalf of our own communities, and that is what we should be doing. The upper house has an entirely other job. This would not be coming back to us if we were not being asked to look at it, to scrutinise it and to make a decision on it. It would not even be here. It is here. It is our job to consider it properly. It is our job to look at it in the context of the current legislation—

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Order! The member for Mordialloc and the member for Gembrook will cease yelling at each other across the chamber.

Ms SHEED: Without going on too long about it, it does reflect part of the way that this house has come to operate. We have no non-government business program. We do not get to consider bills in enough detail. There are many other issues. Let me tell you that in a situation where we have a different make-up of the Parliament these issues will be looked at. They will be dealt with. They need to be taken to a parliamentary committee to look at better ways of running this place. This is just an example of what is not working well. So I support the Manager of Opposition Business’s proposal on this issue.

House divided on motion:

Ayes, 51

Addison, Ms	Foley, Mr	Neville, Ms
Allan, Ms	Fowles, Mr	Pakula, Mr
Blandthorn, Ms	Fregon, Mr	Pallas, Mr
Brayne, Mr	Green, Ms	Pearson, Mr
Brooks, Mr	Halfpenny, Ms	Richards, Ms
Bull, Mr J	Hall, Ms	Richardson, Mr
Carbines, Mr	Halse, Mr	Scott, Mr
Carroll, Mr	Hamer, Mr	Settle, Ms
Cheeseman, Mr	Horne, Ms	Spence, Ms
Connolly, Ms	Hutchins, Ms	Staikos, Mr
Couzens, Ms	Kairouz, Ms	Suleyman, Ms
Crugnale, Ms	Kennedy, Mr	Tak, Mr
D’Ambrosio, Ms	Kilkenny, Ms	Taylor, Mr
Dimopoulos, Mr	Maas, Mr	Theophanous, Ms
Donnellan, Mr	McGhie, Mr	Ward, Ms
Edbrooke, Mr	McGuire, Mr	Williams, Ms
Eren, Mr	Merlino, Mr	Wynne, Mr

Noes, 27

Battin, Mr	McCurdy, Mr	Ryan, Ms
Blackwood, Mr	McLeish, Ms	Sheed, Ms
Britnell, Ms	Morris, Mr	Smith, Mr R
Bull, Mr T	Newbury, Mr	Southwick, Mr
Cupper, Ms	O’Brien, Mr D	Staley, Ms
Guy, Mr	O’Brien, Mr M	Tilley, Mr
Hibbins, Mr	Read, Dr	Vallence, Ms
Hodgett, Mr	Riordan, Mr	Wakeling, Mr

Kealy, Ms

Rowswell, Mr

Walsh, Mr

Motion agreed to.**Message from Council relating to following amendments considered:**

1. Clause 3, page 18, after line 2 insert—

“Mental Health Workforce Safety and Wellbeing Committee means the Mental Health Workforce Safety and Wellbeing Committee established by the Health Secretary under section 327A;”.
2. Clause 12, page 36, line 9, after “wellbeing” insert “including alcohol and other drug support services and treatment”.
3. Page 264, after line 24 insert the following heading—

“Part 6.5A—Mental Health Workforce Safety and Wellbeing Committee”.

NEW CLAUSES

4. Insert the following New Clauses to follow clause 327 and the heading proposed by amendment number 2—

“327A Mental Health Workforce Safety and Wellbeing Committee

- (1) The Health Secretary must establish a Mental Health Workforce Safety and Wellbeing Committee in accordance with the regulations.
- (2) The Mental Health Workforce Safety and Wellbeing Committee consists of members appointed by the Health Secretary.
- (3) The Health Secretary may appoint 2 of the members of the Mental Health Workforce Safety and Wellbeing Committee to jointly chair the Committee.
- (4) Members of the Mental Health Workforce Safety and Wellbeing Committee must have experience, skills or knowledge that is relevant to the objectives of the Mental Health Workforce Safety and Wellbeing Committee.
- (5) The regulations may make provision for or with respect to—
 - (a) the appointment of the Mental Health Workforce Safety and Wellbeing Committee, including the number of members; and
 - (b) the powers and procedures of the Mental Health Workforce Safety and Wellbeing Committee.

327B Objectives of the Mental Health Workforce Safety and Wellbeing Committee

- (1) The objectives of the Mental Health Workforce Safety and Wellbeing Committee are to provide advice to the Health Secretary and the Chief Officer in relation to—
 - (a) the prevention of risks to health, safety and wellbeing in the mental health and wellbeing workforce; and
 - (b) approaches to monitoring and responding to risks to health, safety and wellbeing in the mental health and wellbeing workforce.
- (2) The Mental Health Workforce Safety and Wellbeing Committee may appoint a sub-committee to assist the Mental Health Workforce Safety and Wellbeing Committee to achieve its objectives under subsection (1).”.

Ms WILLIAMS (Dandenong—Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Treaty and First Peoples) (12:43): I move:

That the amendments be agreed to.

The bill that has been put before the house, as we have all acknowledged across both sides of the Parliament, is extraordinarily important and delivers on a key recommendation of the Royal Commission into Victoria’s Mental Health System. It is an important milestone in the 10-year mental health reform program that is required to give effect to the royal commission’s vision and the enormous amount of work that it did.

The bill sets out the foundations for the future of the mental health and wellbeing services in Victoria, one where lived experience voices are at the centre, as they should be, and where mental health professionals are also supported to deliver the best treatment, the best support and the best care in facilities that actually help people recover and facilities that actually enable that new model of care. The bill puts people, as I have said, with lived and living experience of mental illness and psychological distress, their families and also their carers and their supporters at the core of our mental health and wellbeing system. It establishes key new elements of the system's architecture, including the chief officer for mental health and wellbeing; statutory regional mental health and wellbeing boards, which will provide advice on the planning and commissioning of services at the local level; and the new Mental Health and Wellbeing Commission and Youth Mental Health and Wellbeing Victoria as well.

Of course this bill is just one part of a broader context for reform and sits alongside record service investments—more than \$5 billion in just the past two budgets alone, something that we on this side of the house are very proud of and understand the significance and importance of; and also a massive expansion of the workforce, with over 2500 more mental health workers in the next four years. Delivery of this bill acquits in full recommendation 42 of the royal commission's final report, getting us another step closer to full delivery of every single one of the royal commission's recommendations, as we committed to. Just by way of update on that, today work has commenced on over 90 per cent of the recommendations, generating very real momentum and hope for the reimagined mental health and wellbeing system that was envisaged in the royal commission, one that we know all corners of the sector are desperate to see rolled out.

In terms of the amendments that have been put before the house, I will touch first on Ms Patten's amendments in the other place. I understand that Ms Patten proposed an amendment to enshrine requirements for a workplace safety and wellbeing committee in the bill during debate in the other place. The government supported this amendment and it becoming part of the bill now returned here to the Assembly. We were pleased to agree to this amendment and commend both Ms Patten and the Australian Nursing and Midwifery Federation for proposing and moving it. This government is deeply committed to supporting those who work in mental health and wellbeing and knows that nothing can be achieved without a strong, committed but also safe workforce. As the former Minister for Mental Health noted in his second-reading speech on the bill, the clinical, community and support staff that make up the mental health workforce are true heroes. They really are at the core of us being able to deliver on the promise of this reform. We have already established the Mental Health Workforce Safety and Wellbeing Committee in line with recommendation 59 of the royal commission. Enshrining this committee in legislation will ensure its important work of monitoring and providing advice on the physical safety and psychological wellbeing of the workforce and ensure that that continues throughout and beyond the system reforms, as it should do.

In terms of the opposition amendments that are before us, the opposition, I understand, proposed an amendment in the other place to include a reference to alcohol and other drug services within one of the objectives of the bill. I understand that the government also supported this amendment and it has now been incorporated into the bill. We are also committed to ensuring that mental health and wellbeing services are closely connected and working in coordination with alcohol and other drug services in recognition of the overlap that occurs there. This is consistent with our delivery of recommendation 35 in particular of the royal commission, which called for integrated treatment, care and support for people living with mental illness and substance use or addiction. It also aligns with our commitment to establish a new statewide service for people living with mental illness and substance use or addiction challenges as well. The proposed amendment is consistent with the existing health needs principle in clause 22, which requires that the medical and other needs of people living with mental illness or psychological distress are identified and responded to, including any medical or health needs that are related to the use of alcohol or other drugs.

We appreciate the bipartisan support that the bill has, by and large, received in both houses and thank both the opposition and the crossbench. We thank them for their engagement and consideration so far, but as always we are focused on making sure that we meet the promise of the royal commission—that we continue to implement all of its recommendations and, most importantly, to invest where it counts and to invest in the people that will ultimately deliver this reform and ensure that we are rolling out new models of care, recovery-focused models of care, that will ultimately better meet the needs of our community, which we know has to happen, particularly given the stark realities that were given to us by the royal commission into mental health, which very much painted a picture of a system that was broken and desperately in need of repair. That is exactly what we on this side of the house are committed to doing.

Ms KEALY (Lowan) (12:50): It is fabulous to be able to speak today on the amendments that were brought down from the Legislative Council to the Mental Health and Wellbeing Bill 2022. In particular I am very, very supportive and so pleased to see that the amendment that I brought forward in the Legislative Assembly when this bill was first debated a month ago has been supported in the Legislative Council and is now coming back to the Assembly for consideration. I think that it is essential that the alcohol and other drugs sector is appropriately recognised as an essential component of the mental health sector, and therefore I am very, very pleased that we have been able to get support from the government for this important amendment.

As the minister has referenced, it is so important that we do see an overhaul of Victoria's public mental health system. It is something that absolutely has the support of the Liberals and Nationals. We have supported this legislation, we support all elements of the Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System's recommendations and we look forward, when in government, to working with the community and the mental health sector, working with all of the stakeholders and working with those people who have put in so much time and effort, whether they are part of the mental health sector, whether they are volunteers, whether they are carers in the community or whether they are people who are seeking mental health support services or have a loved one that is showing some of those red flags and needs some support but has nowhere to turn at this point in time. These are people who definitely need our support, because we know so well that mental ill health and mental illness still in some areas cause an enormous amount of stigma. While some people are willing to disclose elements of their mental ill health, such as anxiety and depression, they are not yet quite as accepting and willing to share a diagnosed mental illness where they feel they may be judged by their workforce, they might be judged by their friends or they may be judged at their local sporting club. Often, as a result of that, people withdraw from the community, which is perhaps the worst thing that people can do when they are seeking to manage and look after their own mental health.

One of the bigger challenges that we have got when it comes to implementing the royal commission's recommendations is to have a workforce that can actually deliver these support services, particularly when we know elements of the royal commission will enhance greatly the number of services that are available. At the moment on Seek, if you look for mental health jobs in Victoria, there are about 6000 jobs vacant in the mental health sector. It is all well and good to announce that there are going to be new services, but if we do not have the people in there we cannot deliver additional services. That is why I think it is essential that there is a full mental health workforce plan so that we can attract people to Victoria by providing scholarships to people and ensure that people who have dropped out of the sector are encouraged and supported to get back in but also that we have other opportunities to look in every single nook and cranny to ensure that we have got the mental health workforce immediately, not years down the track like we would achieve through training. This is where there were some ideas that were raised through the Pandemic Declaration Accountability and Oversight Committee as part of their considerations of the pandemic orders. Recently they tabled a report, in July 2022, which was a review of the pandemic orders for visitors to hospitals and care facilities. For those members who have not yet had an opportunity to read through the reports of the pandemic oversight committee, I strongly recommend that they do so.

The SPEAKER: Member for Lowan, I ask you to come back to the amendments, please.

Ms KEALY: I am happy to do so, but I do note that the minister strayed quite broadly from the amendments. And therefore—

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Order! This is a narrow debate on the amendments from the Legislative Council. I ask members to stick to the amendments.

Ms KEALY: In regard to the amendments, there is one in particular which is very similar to the one that I put forward in the Legislative Assembly:

Clause 12, page 36, line 9, after “wellbeing” insert “including alcohol and other drug support services and treatment”.

The reason I brought forward this amendment was that too often the alcohol and other drugs sector has been completely ignored as part of the mental health reforms. If you speak to the alcohol and other drugs sector, they say that they feel like they have not been in the room. They just want to be in the room when it comes to discussing how the royal commission’s recommendations will be implemented. This is because there is such a high overlap of people who have mental illness or mental ill health who are also battling the challenges of alcohol and other drugs addiction. This is something that is often referred to as a dual diagnosis—that is the official term—where often people vary between the two, and one can trigger the other.

One of the challenges in accessing Victoria’s public mental health system is that too often people are told, ‘Well, you can’t access alcohol and other drug treatment until you sort out your mental ill health or mental illness first’, and vice versa: people cannot get admitted into a mental health bed unless they sort out their addiction issues first. So you end up where people are in absolute crisis, where often they have not been able to get the mental health support that they desperately need, and they are turning to alcohol and other drugs to self-medicate. This is a critical problem and a massive gap that we are seeing in Victoria because, as we saw over the pandemic, there have been massive impacts on Victorians and harms done to people’s mental health and wellbeing. And because they have not been able to access mental health support services, they have fallen into this cataclysmic gap in service delivery.

We know that over the pandemic there was a massive growth in the number of Victorians waiting for alcohol and other drug treatment services and specifically residential rehab. In the 12 months from December 2020 to December 2021, the number of Victorians on Victoria’s alcohol and other drug residential rehab waitlist grew from 2600 at the end of 2020 to over 4000 Victorians on the waitlist at the end of last year. Sadly, we know that many, many more Victorians have been added to this list, because the mental health harms did not finish as soon as the pandemic orders finished—when people could go back to work, when they could start to get some level of normality back. People are still very, very much struggling to manage their mental health and to make sure that they are getting their routines back and scheduled and finding hope again in the world without the fear of being locked down again. This is very, very real, and unless we can deal with these issues in a way that incorporates the alcohol and other drug sector, we are going to leave so many Victorians behind, and this mental health lag—the shadow pandemic, as it has been labelled—will continue to inflict an enormous amount of harm across the community. It is not just related to the individuals who are battling with their own addiction; it also impacts their family members, their friends and their workplaces and of course can lead to other antisocial behaviour. It can be interactions with police. We know that family violence rates have also escalated, which in part is due to people being locked down in the same house with their perpetrator and the accessibility of alcohol in particular over that lockdown period.

We also know that there is a complete gap when it comes to the treatment options that are available in Victoria. I am very, very proud that the Liberals and Nationals have recognised this gap in working with the sector and we have been able to bring forward election commitments that would help to close this gap. In particular we have made a commitment to build 180 residential rehab or detox facilities

across the state. This includes some facilities in corners of the state which are completely underserved when it comes to alcohol and other drug treatment. It provides support for an alcohol and drug treatment facility in Mildura, and I do commend the previous member for Mildura, Peter Crisp, who is a very good friend of mine. I caught up with Crispy just a few weeks ago. He is still a very, very strong advocate for his local area, and I am really proud that at the last election we were able to make a commitment to build a residential rehab facility up in Mildura. This has been something that we have fought for for a very, very long period of time, and I wish that there was more fierce advocacy in that local area to make that happen. Perhaps if we had a member who was able to prosecute that, they would have that facility available in Mildura right now. But it is four years later than it would have been—four years when people have not been able to access treatment on site and on country.

The SPEAKER: Order! Member for Lowan, can you come back to the amendments before the house.

Ms KEALY: The reason that we put forward an amendment, which has been supported and will be debated today, which makes a specific reference to the alcohol and other drug support services and treatment is that there simply is not enough consideration of alcohol and other drug treatment and not enough access to alcohol and other drug treatment across the state.

Other facilities that the Liberals and Nationals have committed to include the Lookout down at Warrnambool. The member for South-West Coast has been a strong advocate for that facility, and she has done a power of work over the past seven years to secure funding down in that region. There is simply no access to alcohol and other drug treatment in that local area. Recently I was very proud to be down in Warrnambool with the member for South-West Coast to announce that funding. It is very, very important in the Warrnambool community to have access to this. It is something that Geoff has been a fierce advocate for. He really has been a tireless champion when it comes to promoting the need for AOD treatment services in the local area. One of the key things that is so important for people in the Warrnambool area is that the local Indigenous community have access to alcohol and other drug treatment on country. This is something of course that came through the main structure of the bill when it was put to the chamber—recognition of Aboriginal people through the legislation and with treaty—so I absolutely see the announcement by the member for South-West Coast as so important in delivering on the objectives of the Mental Health and Wellbeing Bill 2022. I strongly commend her great work in advocating for that, and I look forward to being able to cut the ribbon on that in a couple of years time when we are in government.

Other facilities across the state include a facility at Shepparton, again another area where there is simply limited access to alcohol and other drug treatment. There are some limited beds in Shepparton in the hospital; however, they are simply not nearly enough to be able to provide that localised support close to home for people who live in that local area. The Latrobe Valley is another area where there are simply no adult services. While it is great that there is a youth facility, it is for all of the state and not just the people who live in the Latrobe Valley, and the nearest other services are at Maryknoll to the west and over in Bairnsdale to the east, so there is a real gap in the Latrobe Valley, but there is a fierce demand for services in that area. The other area of course is Frankston. We know that that area desperately needs AOD services, but we have not seen the delivery of any of that support by the Labor government.

The sixth facility that we have announced is a withdrawal facility, and this is in recognition of the fact that there is a massive bottleneck in the state of Victoria when it comes to accessing a residential rehab bed. There simply are not enough withdrawal facilities or detox facilities to be able to provide a smooth flowthrough of people so that they have completed their detox period, have completed their withdrawal and are then acceptable to the residential rehabilitation units in the state. Because of this bottleneck there often is not a smooth flow. It becomes very, very difficult in terms of the timing.

I remember speaking to a man a couple of years ago now who was participating in the ReGen program and was speaking of when he finally got to his moment where he realised he wanted and was seeking

treatment for his alcohol addiction. He spoke of this scenario where he would have to white-knuckle it for weeks at a time until he could actually access the support services and get into a treatment program. We know now that that period of white-knuckling has absolutely blown out. The waitlists are not managed well because there is not a good way to have that oversight. There is an intake model, but it is simply not working. It means that people are falling on and off the list. It is basically up to the individual AOD rehab providers to keep in touch with people while they are on that waitlist, and they are not sufficiently funded to do so. There is a lot of pressure on the AOD sector at the moment, and they know that they simply have not got enough resources.

Access to resi rehab is only part of the puzzle, though. I am very, very pleased that recently I was able to announce at the Victorian Alcohol and Drug Association (VAADA) AOD forum, which pulled in some of the key stakeholders from AOD services across the state, that when in government the Liberals and Nationals will launch Australia's first gold-standard opioid treatment model. We will launch a hydromorphone trial. This is so important. It is a really groundbreaking thing when it comes to dealing with opioid addiction, particularly heroin addiction of course, and it has such an amazingly high success rate.

This is not just about treating heroin addicts and giving them another option as opposed to methadone or going through a rehabilitation program; it is actually more about ensuring that that individual has the best possible opportunity to get their life back on track. This includes ensuring that they have got access to housing, that any issues around homelessness are dealt with in that scenario, making sure they get mental health support and that they do have access to family violence support—and of course other health issues that might arise and so often do arise. When people are right in the depths of heroin addiction and often are living rough they are reliant quite often on illegal activities to support illicit substance use, and it is an extraordinarily difficult scenario for these individuals to break out of that cycle.

Without more treatment options, without things like this gold-standard, world-leading hydromorphone trial in Victoria, we are really not providing a good option out for people who are battling heroin addiction. So I am enormously proud that the Liberals and Nationals have been able to make this announcement, to be the first to commit to this, and I absolutely look forward to making that a reality in government. It is something that I think will be transformational when it comes to the options that are available for AOD treatment in the state of Victoria.

Another aspect around monitoring alcohol and other drug treatment has been around the rollout of SafeScript. Now, there was an article in the *Herald Sun* today which highlighted some of the really concerning rates of what are called red flags in the SafeScript system. When a pharmacy identifies through their dispensing of drugs that there have been too many drugs, an opioid or a benzo, prescribed to an individual—if the rates are outside what the normal limits and the set limits are—then this will create a red flag in the system. It is absolutely amazing to consider that over 1.2 million red flags have been raised in Victoria over the past two years—1.2 million alerts. This is very, very concerning from the point that there simply has not been the back end of the system put in place in regard to SafeScript. The IT system has been rolled out, which is great, but we have not seen the support mechanisms put in place.

It has been so sad to hear from pharmacists who know that they are unable to dispense to somebody who has been given this red flag, but they have not been given any structure over where they then refer them—what alcohol and other drug support can they provide to them and what treatment options are available to them. Sadly, as a result, I have heard of instances where people have turned to the black market. This is something that came out through a VAADA media release. They actually provided a comment within the *Herald Sun* article today as well around people turning to the black market when they are not able to get the TGA-approved drugs dispensed from the pharmacy.

The challenge of this is that I have actually heard of people turning to heroin because they have not been able to access the pain medication that has otherwise been prescribed. We cannot just cut people off, leave them to their own devices and let them go cold turkey without any support at all. It is a

critical failure in the rollout of SafeScript, because it is so much more than just an IT system. It is absolutely an alert system, but we need to make sure we have the support at the back end to make sure individuals who are battling with addiction to pain medication have got the support to reduce their use of that pain medication or be given alternatives and not be forced to just go cold turkey.

The reason that I really strongly believe we need to get SafeScript right and why I am so disappointed that this government has not got it right is because I have got fabulous constituents in my electorate, John and Marg Millington, who have been amazing advocates when it comes to making sure that SafeScript works well. Sadly their son Simon died of a prescription drug overdose, and I would just like to read through the Millingtons' story, which I was able to read through when the SafeScript legislation was brought through this chamber in the last term of Parliament:

Following a single car accident in 1994, our 18-year-old son Simon, sustained life-threatening injuries, requiring a lengthy period in hospital, followed by many ongoing operations to improve his way of life. In the end however, it would be medications, given to help him, that would prove to be the biggest problem, not just his injuries. He had become addicted to the opioids and benzodiazepines which he had been given so freely after his accident, to relieve his pain. After courageously battling his addiction on & off for 16 years, Simon died of an overdose of the legal drug/pharmaceutical, oxycontin combined with alcohol in 2010, he was 34.

He left a daughter behind. I just feel so strongly for the Millington family. I know them so well. They are so giving and caring, and they have been so generous in sharing their personal story, not just with Victoria but with Australia and worldwide. They have been fighting for a really long time to get SafeScript in place and working. They have also been fighting at a national level to ensure that this program is rolled out so that people cannot cross the border to go pharmacy shopping.

I commend the Millingtons for their fabulous work in this sector. I acknowledge the great work that they have done, but we owe it to them, if no-one else, to make sure that people who are in the midst of an addiction to prescription medication do have the opportunity to have alternative treatments put in place so that they are not just simply cut off from the dispensation of painkillers that they are addicted to. They need to be treated as a human being and as an individual that has absolutely every right to access treatment and support rather than just saying, 'You can't have that anymore'. It is not fair, and it is not delivering what was promised by the SafeScript program.

I actually remember back—it would be nearly eight years ago—when I was first a candidate for Lowan and I was driving back from a day out on the hustings. I was listening to the ABC news, and I heard a grab from the then health minister, David Davis, who was announcing funding for the SafeScript program. I think it was late in the campaign, and it just meant so much to me because I knew how much it meant for the Millingtons that that funding would be delivered and that we would be able to make SafeScript a reality. It made me realise how important it is to make the most of your time in this place and that you can make a real difference, but I do not think that we have delivered on the full outcomes of what SafeScript was supposed to deliver. So I urge the government to put that greater focus on the back end of SafeScript. If we have the opportunity when in government, we will certainly ensure that SafeScript is more than just an IT system, more than just a computer program that flags somebody when they have had too many prescriptions given to them for opioids and benzodiazepines. We want to make sure that they actually get the support to reduce their reliance on addictive pain medication and that they can be given assistance to deal with their pain as well.

We know that parts of the amendments that have been brought before us are around the Mental Health Workforce Safety and Wellbeing Committee. This is so important, particularly in relation to improving the safety and wellbeing of staff who all too often see violence in the workplace because people are unable to get mental health support. There are simply not enough workers around to be able to provide alternatives to restraint and seclusion, and there is an element of this wellbeing committee which will focus on that.

We know that the government has made the decision to not deal with restraint and seclusion in this iteration of the bill. It is expected there will be further consultation with the sector on how we can get

that balance right between ensuring that people who are in the midst of mental ill health or mental illness and who are in a situation where they need interventional treatment and who choose not to be restrained or secluded have a right to get the care and treatment that they need and that they know is right for them, and at the same time, making sure that clinicians are provided with support so they do not have that as the only tool in their toolbox.

Sadly, what we hear all too often is that there are simply not enough workers in mental health. There are not enough nursing staff, there are not enough psychologists or psychiatrists, there are not enough support workers of any kind, particularly in emergency departments but also on the ward, to be able to provide more intensive support for people when they are in a crisis, as opposed to restraint or seclusion. That is why we need to make sure that not only do we get the legislation right, we actually get the workforce right, because again, unless we deal with the mental health workforce critical shortages—and as I referenced earlier there are currently 6000 jobs available in Victoria for mental health workers—it is going to be extraordinarily hard to reach the aspiration of the royal commission to remove restraint and seclusion in Victoria's public mental health system within 10 years. Absolutely that is something that is achievable and something that we should aspire to, but until we get the workforce right then we are simply not going to be able to deliver on that.

In relation to the other amendments, there is of course the inclusion of another committee. There was one amendment that did not come through, and that was the one that we were unable to put forward in the chamber because it included an appropriation. That was to look at an older adult mental health and wellbeing entity in the same way that the legislation sets out a youth mental health and wellbeing entity. I understand that it was raised in the Legislative Council and the feedback from the government in the upper house was that it was not required because it would be covered through the Victorian Collaborative Centre for Mental Health and Wellbeing. While I acknowledge that, I still believe that if we are going to do something focused on youth, because we understand the impact that lockdowns and restrictions have had particularly on the youth of Victoria, we also need to recognise that older Victorians have suffered an extraordinary amount and all too often are forgotten people when it comes to ensuring there is an appropriate response, not just in mental health but in all stages of life and in all different areas that the government have oversight of. I still believe that we need to have a greater focus on the mental health and wellbeing of older Victorians, particularly for those who have suffered so much through loneliness over the lockdowns and restrictions and who continue to do so even in aged care. Even though there are so many facilities that are doing a fine job of that, others are not, and I think there has been a lot of focus on that. There are actually a lot of aged care facilities that do a great job in helping people manage their transition into older age and into end of life, and sometimes the workers are the only visitors and people from outside the facility that people see as they get older.

I believe that there are also changes required in transition in terms of finding your place in the world as you lose a loved one, either through death or a breakdown of a relationship, or friends—you go to more funerals than you do to weddings. There are also people who have stepped out of the workforce and retired and therefore have lost their place and lost the feeling that they are putting back into the community. There are a whole range of elements where we really need to make sure the government is focusing on ensuring Victorians are looked after, not just when they are young but also as they become older, because they are equally valuable to the community and are equally important no matter what age they are.

Just as a summary, I do support the amendments. I am particularly pleased to see that we have had support for our amendment, which will ensure there is a specific mention of alcohol and other drug support services in the obligations of the bill. This will of course open up access to funding through the mental health surcharge, which will provide funding security for the mental health sector, who really do feel like they have been left behind between these behemoths of mental health funding and health funding. They need security of funding. At the last budget they had a \$40 million cut. They had 100 jobs cut out of their sector. They do not need that at the moment. There is more demand than there has ever been for alcohol and other drug treatment support services in the state of Victoria.

I commend all mental health workers for the fabulous job that they have done, particularly over the past three years with the pandemic restrictions and lockdowns, and I also commend all of the alcohol and other drug workers. Simply put, at the end of the day they just want a light at the end of the tunnel. They know that they have a job to do. They love doing what they do and they want to help people, but they know they need more resources. They need more workers in the sector to be able to deliver the services they know Victorians need. They need more workers to be able to deliver on the recommendations of the royal commission. That is why unless we support the workers in mental health and show that it is a desirable place to work—that they are paid fairly, they are treated fairly and they can make a real difference in the community—it will be very, very difficult to see substantive change through the royal commission’s recommendations. The Liberals and Nationals absolutely support all recommendations of the Royal Commission into Victoria’s Mental Health System, and we commend the amendments to the house.

Mr EDBROOKE (Frankston) (13:20): It is indeed my pleasure to rise and speak on the amendments to this bill. I will just put it plainly: my bullshit detector has been going off amazingly for the past half an hour. I sit here and I listen to the words coming out of the opposition’s mouths, but unfortunately the action does not relate to those words.

Ms Staley: On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, that is unparliamentary language.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: I just caution the member on unparliamentary language.

Mr EDBROOKE: I withdraw. It was not long ago that we were hearing in the news about the opposition voting against this bill that was introduced into Parliament last May, with Matthew Guy telling a whole press conference that he was going to scrap the tax, or the levy, worth billions of dollars, to fund the recommendations of the Royal Commission into Victoria’s Mental Health System. He said that in the context that he does not want to introduce any new taxes.

Ms Kealy: On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, as was raised during my contribution to the bill, this is actually a very narrow debate. It is in relation to the amendments put forward by the Legislative Council. I ask you to bring the member back to the amendments.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Member for Frankston, can I just caution you to get back. I know it is wideranging, but please contain yourself just to the amendments before the house.

Mr EDBROOKE: Thank you, Deputy Speaker. As always you are doing an amazing job. It is a narrow field, but we do need to provide context, especially for those at home that are listening to this debate thinking, ‘I could actually believe the words that are coming out of those mouths’. But the facts are different. We had a backflip from their colleague David Davis in the other place and also from the member who was just on her feet, saying, ‘We won’t backflip on the tax, we will have the tax’, which was music to people’s ears, but it might have just been because there was an election in South Australia that the Liberals were smashed in.

Ms Kealy: On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, I ask you to direct the member to adhere to your ruling—this is a very narrow debate—and to limit his contribution to the amendments before the house.

Ms Blandthorn: On the point of order, Deputy Speaker, I appreciate the point of order of those opposite, but I do think that the member is being relevant. As he indicated, for those listening to this debate the context is relevant to the debate at hand. He is providing context, not debating the substance of the bill as opposed to the amendments.

Ms Staley: On the point of order, Deputy Speaker, none of the amendments go to the levy. They are simply about establishing another committee, the Mental Health Workforce Safety and Wellbeing Committee, and including alcohol and other drug services. The member is well outside the scope of this debate.

Mr Richardson: On the point of order, Deputy Speaker, the lead speaker made a number of points, including, in conclusion, about the levy as well as the performance of the members for Mildura and Shepparton during that debate. It is customary to respond to actions of debate and respond to some of the points that have been raised by the members opposite in the contributions that they have made. The member for Frankston is simply responding to the points that have been put on the record by the member for Lowan in her contribution to the house.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: At this point there is no point of order, but I will just caution the member to use correct titles as well. I know we have a number of amendments and you are providing some context, so continue on, on the note that you please contain yourself to speaking to the amendments before the house.

Mr EDBROOKE: Thank you, Deputy Speaker, and I do appreciate the counsel. We stand here today, and we divided before on the question of whether essentially the opposition has had enough time to look at the amendments that have come from the upper house. They argued that they did not, and then we had someone from the opposition rise and speak with prepared notes for half an hour on these amendments. Something does not smell right to me, and this is I think where those people at home who might be interested in this debate and might be listening to this debate—mental health might be something that is very, very close to their hearts—want to see honesty and want to see clarity. I am very familiar with the amendments that were put up on this bill, the amendments from the Reason Party member, Fiona Patten. I believe that amendment was about a page and a half in total, and that is for a bill that is nearly 3 inches thick. This is the work of the Andrews Labor government, and it is going to take our mental health system from—

Ms Staley: On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, you actually still cannot use a bill as a prop. Props are not allowed.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Member for Frankston, continue on. The bill is not a prop. You can use the bill.

Mr EDBROOKE: I have no tinfoil hidden in here to make a hat, so I am not sure what is going on here, Deputy Speaker. But I do note that the amendment from the Reason Party was about a page and a half long. It was a considered amendment; it was considered in the upper house and voted on and accepted. The amendment that the opposition put forward in the upper house is one line:

Clause 12, page 36, line 9, after “wellbeing” insert “including alcohol and other drug support services and treatment”.

We have been delaying Parliament for at least half an hour now based on one line. The issue that I have got is that there has not been much consultation by the opposition with those who work at the coalface. I spoke to some mental health workers in Frankston the other day in Spray Street—fantastic people, salt of the earth—and they have never met that crew over there. I spoke to the health and community support workers union, HACSU. They have basically never been approached by these people. These are the people that they are purporting to represent with these amendments. What everyone at home and what everyone here wants to hear is, one, that you not just support all the recommendations from the royal commission, which came from the blood, sweat and tears of so many Victorians, but that you fully support the levy that will pay for those recommendations to lift our mental health system up from a broken system, for some people a disastrous system—and we have heard about all those lived-experience examples—to a system that works and a system that is informed by lived experience.

We had some members from the opposition talking about me not speaking on the bill, but we got two medically supervised injecting rooms, I believe. This is a bit of a bugbear of mine, because in this place we have heard the medically supervised injecting room in Richmond spoken about so, so often, and I am only just responding to the lead speaker’s repertoire on this. We have heard those people

victimised. We have heard the way that they have been portrayed in that area: as people that are criminals, not people that have health needs.

Now we hear the opposition saying that they support medically supervised injecting rooms and drug rehab, and also I note that in the announcement for more rehab beds there was no announcement of a critical piece of that infrastructure, which is actually the withdrawal treatment. Rehabilitation is not so much about the beds being a blocker; there are beds out there, but there are only a few services that provide the seven-day or more—depending on the substance that has been taken and that the person is relying on—clinical hospital kind of setting treatment that is required before people are ready and physically able to undergo rehabilitation. So mentioning that you will make a commitment to a million beds will not matter unless these people can get the right clinical treatment to actually be in a space where physically they are able to undergo a rehabilitation program, and there are plenty of good examples out there.

We have also heard ‘We do not want to see this politicised’, yet they will go around the world to all the independent seats, Mildura being one. I thought the member for Mildura was probably unfairly victimised there. She has done a whole lot as far as health goes in her community, as have I in my community. We can hear Frankston being spoken about, but we are building a \$1.13 billion hospital. We have just taken over a private hospital, which will provide 9500 elective surgeries a year, and we have also got a whole floor in the new hospital committed to mental health. This is what our community asked for.

I just come back to that notion of consultation: you really, really need to listen to people, like we did with the royal commission. And here it is: we listened and we produced. We actually deliver. The levy, which the opposition seem very confused about, is needed to actually fund all those reforms that are needed. I commend the amendments to the house.

Ms BRITNELL (South-West Coast) (13:30): I rise to speak on the Mental Health and Wellbeing Bill 2022 amendments made by the Legislative Council. I am pleased to focus mainly on the amendment that was brought into the Legislative Assembly by the member for Lowan, a very simple and very clear amendment, which brings alcohol and drug support services and treatment into the wellbeing bill. The reason I would stress this is such a good amendment is that in my experience, whenever I was working with clients with mental health or drug and alcohol issues, whilst they do not always come together, it is not unusual or uncommon for people with mental health issues to have drug and alcohol issues. They do not always, I understand that, but it is certainly not uncommon. When we had patients who we would call dual-diagnosis clients or complex clients, it was very frustrating to be told by the mental health team that they could not take them as an inpatient until their drug and alcohol problem was addressed. It was absolutely crazy stuff when your client was at their wits’ end and really needing assistance and that was standing in the way. So I am not surprised to hear that the organisations that work in the drug and alcohol and mental health sectors agree that these are things that should go together. I commend the good work of the member for Lowan to put such an obvious amendment in, and I am very pleased to talk about its importance and the improvements it will bring to the Mental Health and Wellbeing Bill.

In South-West Coast we have been asking for improved services for many years. When I was first elected, one of the issues that was brought to my attention, and it had been an issue that I was well aware of, was the need for drug and alcohol rehabilitation beds. The Lookout project was born. The community got right behind it and raised a lot of money in a very short period of time, showing the Labor government that this was a need that the community were prepared to put their money behind. It is also where Infrastructure Victoria said there was a need, and their 30-year strategy released last year highlights South-West Coast as one of two places in Victoria in need.

So why is it important? If you have got a drug and alcohol issue and you want to rehabilitate, it is incredibly important that you do it around family and friends, where you have the support to see success actually as sustainable and to get your life back on track. That is a really obvious finding where

we have seen it in other places. Why does south-west Victoria not have one yet? We have had a committee, headed up by Geoff Soma at the wraparound services of the Western Region Drug and Alcohol Centre, with some fantastic people who have been advocating in the community for seven years and getting all the ticks and crosses and i's dotted and t's crossed, yet the Labor government just continues to ignore it. I urge the Labor candidate to come out and support our announcement. The member for Lowan came recently with the Leader of the Opposition to announce our 30-bed rehabilitation centre commitment so that we can once and for all address this need that is so glaringly obvious in South-West Coast. All the Labor candidate has to do is meet that commitment and match it so that we can put the politics to bed and get on with helping the community of South-West Coast address those issues. Those mothers, those aunts, those cousins, those sisters and those brothers who really want to help their family member and support them in their own environment in South-West Coast in their rehabilitation journey beg you to assist us to get on with doing this. You would not leave someone with a broken leg on the street. Why on earth are we leaving people with health issues like drug addiction out in the cold like we are in South-West Coast?

The Labor government in Victoria does not have a great track record of providing residential rehab beds. Figures from Victorian drug and alcohol services show that in 2021 the ratio of beds per 10 000 people in Victoria was only 0.74. That was compared to 2.52 for the ACT, 1.39 in Western Australia, 1.86 in Tasmania, 1.2 in New South Wales, 1 in Queensland and 9.55 in the Northern Territory. Only South Australia had a lower ratio than us here in Victoria. That is a terrible track record, especially when you have got a community right behind it. It really does please me to see this obvious omission from the bill being rectified.

I cannot commend it more highly when I look at the Lookout and how important that is, and also when I see things like the SafeScript findings in the *Herald Sun* today: that over the last two years we have had 1.2 million red flags. When someone goes into a pharmacy, a red flag is raised when they have sought too many scripts for opioids or benzos or have been doctor shopping. But the problem I see with this is that despite that and despite this government saying they are doing so much, there are no wraparound services to help those people. So what do we expect? If you have got an addiction that has been supported with scripts and then you are left completely high and dry, do you expect people to just say, 'Oh, it's time for me to give it up'? Well, no, it is actually quite dangerous. The risk of cardiac arrest and the risk of seizure are quite high and quite real. That is why we have detox beds in hospitals, because before rehab you need that. To have a SafeScript system and then not put the wraparound services in place—which this government promised—is absolutely criminal. It is dangerous, and it is why we see people dying.

Mr Richardson interjected.

Ms BRITNELL: Well, it is. It actually is really, really wrong. And people die.

Mr Richardson interjected.

Ms BRITNELL: Well, if you have a seizure from withdrawal—the member for Mordialloc is questioning my statement that this is really quite—

Mr Richardson interjected.

Ms BRITNELL: People withdrawing without supervision is dangerous, and that is my point.

The hydromorphone trial that we have announced will be launched here in Victoria when we are elected as a Liberal-Nationals government—the first in the Southern Hemisphere but very much part of the treatment in Belgium, Spain, Canada, Denmark, Germany, the Netherlands and the UK—and is something I think we should all be very proud of being able to actually see happen. It will be a gold-standard hydromorphone trial, and opioid agonist therapy is a gold-standard treatment in the primary treatment of opioid dependence. They are the sorts of things we need to put in place so we do not have people literally left high and dry when they are simply seeking access to a drug that they have been

put on probably because they are in pain or have been in an accident—or perhaps they are on a waiting list for surgery like we are seeing in Victoria now for nearly 100 000 people. If you have ever had the need for a knee replacement or a hip replacement and you are in incredible pain, you usually need to have opioids, such as oxycodone, OxyContin or Endone, and they are addictive. If you have got to wait two years or four years or what we are seeing here in the state of Victoria, not only are you going to end up having to rehabilitate and learn to walk again when you get your new knee or your new hip, you are probably going to have to go through withdrawal and find a way to get back the life you had prior to having to have so many opioids to get through that terribly long waiting period. I think the government has a responsibility to take on these issues when we have waiting lists that are blowing out—and to not use excuses but instead put plans in place, support resources for the nursing staff and listen to the advice of the doctors, who over the last two years have been completely ignored and now have blown-out waiting lists. The Andrews Labor government have absolutely missed the mark, and the health system is now in a massive crisis as a result of that mismanagement. They simply did not listen to the people who know—the doctors, the surgeons and the nursing staff—and that has resulted in this critical blowout of the waiting list and is leaving people addicted.

In summary, I support the Mental Health and Wellbeing Bill 2022 with the amendments, particularly the amendment brought forward by the member for Lowan. We would not be here having this debate if it had just been sensibly thought through when we had the first debate, and we would be showing and demonstrating that when you scrutinise a bill, if there is a good improvement, just adopt it instead of being arrogant and throwing it out and wasting all the time that we have wasted when we could have got on with this. People with addictions, people with mental health issues and people with dual diagnosis deserve the right to caring treatment from the community, and that is simply all the amendment does. It recognises the importance of complex clients, dual diagnosis and making sure the sector—which is asking for this—is listened to, which is why this amendment was moved by the member for Lowan. I again support the member for Lowan and thank her for the good work she has done with the Lookout, and we look forward to being in government and delivering on that.

Mr RICHARDSON (Mordialloc) (13:40): It is a pleasure to rise on the Mental Health and Wellbeing Bill 2022 amendments and talk a little bit about some of the changes and the journey that has happened. There are 885 clauses in this bill and over 650 pages of work that has gone in, underpinned by the 65 recommendations of the Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System.

I do not discount the sincerity of the member for Lowan—not only the personal experience but the experience she has as a member of Parliament that she detailed in her important contribution—but the surrounding issues that we have had in moving this discussion forward this morning for a slight but important amendment, a symbolic amendment that the government agreed to, have been extraordinary. The opposition were there as part of the Legislative Council debate. They were clearly briefed on the government's intention to incorporate nine words in clause 12, page 36, line 9—nine words that apparently needed 250 hours plus 1 hour of engagement for clauses that number 885. That is a bit of an extraordinary thing, but maybe that goes towards some of the challenges they are facing in working out what is going on. I am assuming the opposition were there during the votes that were taken in the chamber. That amendment of nine words to a bill that is 650 pages long and has 885 clauses—I hope that they are quite clear on what those changes are.

The contributions of the two speakers from those opposite have been important, but they need to be clarified, because when you talk about alcohol and other drug treatments and support as well, the royal commission underpins a lot of that support and those recommendations. In fact the previous Minister for Mental Health went through in great detail at the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee some of the investment that has already been made—\$10 million for the recent grants to the Mental Health and Alcohol and Other Drugs Facilities Renewal Fund that built on the \$20 million committed to the Mental Health and Alcohol and Other Drugs Facilities Renewal Fund in the 2020–21 state budget, and with more than \$50 million invested over the last few years. That is the record of the Andrews

Labor government. We did not just tune in recently. There has been \$50 million of that investment, and there is more to come.

When those opposite talk about bipartisan engagement and commitment, what really stresses out Victorians, particularly those that experience mental ill health, is one comment by the Leader of the Opposition that they do not support the \$3.7 billion mental health levy, and then on the other side they come back a little bit later and say that they do support it. When we are looking for bipartisanship and clarity in policy, it is really disconcerting when you see those changes in debate, when you see those changes in policy for something that was recommended by one of the biggest and most substantial royal commissions. How can Victorians have confidence that all elements of this bill will be protected in perpetuity beyond this Parliament and supported into the future? That is the big challenge with this bill. There has been a substantial amount of work to get to this point. It is enshrined in legislation and underpinned by a levy—the equivalent of what we see with the Transport Accident Commission, where we have that support through ongoing funding certainty. We need that in this bill. These amendments will be undermined if that change happens under the opposition.

To bring all these recommendations to Parliament has been an extraordinary effort. I have to say this is 650 pages of legislation, 885 clauses, so to get to a double-sided page of what would be changed is a pretty extraordinary effort. In fact it speaks to some of the bipartisan nature of the approach to this bill, and it is important. This should be above politics. It should be multipartisan support. We should all have a shared investment in lowering the suicide toll in Victoria. We lose 700 Victorians each and every year, 2½ times the road toll. It is a devastating tragedy that is preventable. The failure in the system and the challenges that we faced led to the royal commission and led to the Premier stepping forward and saying that despite the billions of dollars of extra funding that were put into mental health and wellbeing, the system is broken and we need to do better. That is underpinned by the 65 recommendations and dozens of subparts that underpin each and every one of these recommendations. It bursts off the page. It provides chapter and verse of what we needed to do. The interim report was quite telling as well. This is where this bill finds itself now.

It is a real credit to this Parliament, and I really do want to commend those in the Legislative Council for the way that they engaged in that debate and the spirit with which they approached it. Very different to having just five speakers across the Liberal-Nationals—27 members of Parliament in this house represent their parties but could not even muster more than 20 per cent. It was less than 20 per cent of their members who contributed to this landmark legislation. So when we talk about consultation and engagement in this place, when we talk about fronting up on behalf of, on average, 50 000 constituents and all the community groups that we represent—if this bill meant so much to those opposite, they would have fronted up more than five speakers and would have had more than 20 per cent of their people contributing to this bill, because it matters; it is generational. In fact it is intergenerational, and that is why the work done here is so important.

The amendments go to a couple of key areas. I think both the member for Frankston and the Minister for Mental Health importantly touched on Legislative Council member Ms Patten's amendments. The amendments were proposed to enshrine the requirement for a workplace safety and wellbeing committee in the bill during the debate in the other place. That was played out and ventilated in some detail. The government did support this amendment. It is an important amendment and an important addition to this incredible legislation, and we are pleased to agree with that and commend both Ms Patten and the Australian Nursing and Midwifery Federation for proposing and moving this important amendment.

The government is deeply committed to supporting those who work in our mental health and wellbeing sector. We will recruit, train and support a further 2500 workers. I want to take this opportunity to give them a shout-out. They are extraordinary people. During the pandemic it has been substantially challenging for our mental health and wellbeing workforce. The Health and Community Services Union (HACSU) do an incredible job in representing their workers. They are an outstanding group of

people supporting that workforce who are doing everything they can to support the mental health and wellbeing outcomes for our communities.

There is such a purpose and a feeling of energy coming forward to get this work. You do not want to waste a day when you have got such a landmark reform, and each and every day right at the front line in services across our state and across our communities HACSU and their members do an extraordinary job in supporting the mental health and wellbeing outcomes in our communities. They know they have got a government in the Andrews Labor government who backs them—not only in every single element in funding, but we support their union and we support the work that they do. We are not cutting services. There is no ambiguity on where we stand in investing in mental health. That is what we call for here today—the change in opposition policy simply because of the pressure that came from media needs to be clarified more. There are people really scared and concerned in the mental health and wellbeing sector that the opposition will cut funding again in the future. The \$3.7 billion—how much was it ridiculed during debate? How much was it ridiculed during the budget? Opposition speakers undermined, during the state budget, the contributions that would be made through the mental health and wellbeing levy. Suddenly they had an epiphany and agreed to it based on political pressure. We know deep down this is one of the biggest concerns: that if you undermine the mental health and wellbeing levy and you take that funding away you are risking lives and risking the support of people who are debilitated with mental ill health.

I want to also just touch briefly on the opposition amendment. It was in a bipartisan nature that the nine words were included in the bill. I think the member for Lowan, to her credit, articulated the importance of that addition, and hopefully, despite a bit of sledging from the member for Mildura and the member for Shepparton, we can acquit that, because that is more about Nats and independent stuff rather than truly the substance of the issue. The member for Lowan, in a number of her contributions, listening through some of her comments—it is a really important discussion point. The particular reference that the member for Lowan made to her community and a family that were deeply impacted—you could see that passion and energy. Let us have that in our bipartisan approach to this landmark reform. Let us bank it in, lock it in and work together regardless of who is in government or what Parliament it is. Let us work together on these really important policy areas. This is a 10-year agenda. It will be across multiple governments and multiple representations into the future. So let us put our shoulders to the wheel and work well as we embark on this landmark reform.

So that amendment, in good faith, was agreed to. It is important to incorporate it into this bill, 885 clauses long and more than 650 pages, that will change the lives and save the lives of Victorians.

Motion agreed to.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: A message will now be sent to the Legislative Council informing them of the house's decision.

CRIMES LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL 2022

**EDUCATION LEGISLATION AMENDMENT (ADULT AND COMMUNITY
EDUCATION AND OTHER MATTERS) BILL 2022**

TREATY AUTHORITY AND OTHER TREATY ELEMENTS BILL 2022

VICTORIAN ENERGY EFFICIENCY TARGET AMENDMENT BILL 2022

Royal assent

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (13:50): I inform the house that the Governor gave royal assent to the following bills: the Crimes Legislation Amendment Bill 2022, the Education Legislation Amendment (Adult and Community Education and Other Matters) Bill 2022, the Treaty Authority and Other Treaty Elements Bill 2022 and the Victorian Energy Efficiency Target Amendment Bill 2022.

Business of the house**STANDING AND SESSIONAL ORDERS**

Ms BLANDTHORN (Pascoe Vale—Leader of the House, Minister for Planning) (13:51): I move, by leave:

That so much of standing and sessional orders be suspended to allow the following arrangements to come into effect on Tuesday, 13 September 2022, and remain in place until Thursday, 15 September 2022:

Valedictory statements

- (1) At 2.50 pm each day, the Chair will interrupt business to allow retiring members to make valedictory statements for up to 15 minutes each.
- (2) Any business under discussion at the time of interruption that has not been completed will be resumed immediately after the valedictory statements and any member speaking at the time of the interruption may continue their speech.
- (3) If members are making valedictory statements at:
 - (a) 4.00 pm on Wednesday;
 - (b) the time allocated for completion of government business under SO 97; or
 - (c) the time set for the adjournment under Sessional Order 2—

the Chair will not interrupt business until members have completed their statements.

Motion agreed to.

Ms STALEY (Ripon) (13:52): On behalf of the Liberals and Nationals, I desire to move, by leave:

That so much of standing and sessional orders be suspended so that general business, notice of motion 33, in the name of the member for Shepparton, be debated immediately.

Leave refused.

Ms SHEED (Shepparton) (13:52): By leave, I desire to move:

That so much of standing and sessional orders be suspended to allow general business, notice of motion 33, relating to the reintroduction of non-government business into this house, to be debated immediately.

Leave refused.**PROGRAM**

Ms BLANDTHORN (Pascoe Vale—Leader of the House, Minister for Planning) (13:53): 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 5.00 pm on Thursday, 1 September 2022:

Casino Legislation Amendment (Royal Commission Implementation and Other Matters) Bill 2022

Early Childhood Legislation Amendment Bill 2022

Major Crime and Community Safety Legislation Amendment Bill 2022.

Monitoring of Places of Detention by the United Nations Subcommittee on Prevention of Torture (OPCAT) Bill 2022.

There are a number of important bills to debate this week, and I think that after this morning's efforts everybody will be glad to get to the consideration and debate of those bills. Can I again, as I usually do, begin my remarks by thanking the Manager of Opposition Business for continuing to work with us over the past two weeks and for having a constructive relationship. In terms of this week and next week—the last two weeks of debate to go in this place—we are certainly very committed to providing some very important bills to be considered within the house. There are four bills, as I said, proposed for debate and consideration this week, and I am delighted to provide a brief overview of each of those.

Firstly, we have the Early Childhood Legislation Amendment Bill 2022, which goes to enhancing the regulatory system for early childhood education in Victoria. As the mother of a four-year-old—I accidentally last week described her as a three-year-old, and apparently she just missed seeing it on

the screen, which both the grandparents and my husband reported was very fortunate—I know firsthand just how important the government’s agenda in this regard is and how much it goes to ensuring that we provide for the best possible opportunities for all children to develop and achieve their full potential. The bill is about ensuring that Victoria continues to be a nation leader in providing children with quality early childhood education that sets them up for life. It builds on the work that has already been undertaken by this government in supporting the regulator and giving them tools to uphold safety and quality standards across the early childhood sector. It is certainly something that I think is important and dear to all of us.

We have the Casino Legislation Amendment (Royal Commission Implementation and Other Matters) Bill 2022, which follows the release of the report of the Royal Commission into the Casino Operator and Licence in October last year. The bill represents the most significant reforms to casino regulation that this state has seen in decades. It also marks the next step in our comprehensive response to the royal commission’s recommendations. It introduces nation-leading reforms to tackle gambling-related harm and address money-laundering risks at Crown Melbourne in response to the concerns found by the royal commission. Victorians are absolutely entitled to a casino operator that acts with integrity and transparency, and this bill is the next step in ensuring that that does happen and that we can give Victorians the confidence that those integrity checks are there.

We have the Monitoring of Places of Detention by the United Nations Subcommittee on Prevention of Torture (OPCAT) Bill 2022. This bill demonstrates our support for the principles of the Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment. When we turn our minds to the atrocities that continue to be inflicted on our fellow people around the world, bills like this really are of absolute importance and are so crucial to the work that government does in supporting the human rights not only of our own citizens but of our fellow people around the world. I am very glad that we have the opportunity to consider that bill.

We have the Major Crime and Community Safety Legislation Amendment Bill 2022, which modernises and streamlines essential powers to combat crime and target the proceeds of crime in Victoria and acquits significant commitments of the *Community Safety Statement 2018–19*. It will also streamline, clarify and modernise fingerprint and search warrant powers and the use of assumed identities in criminal investigations as well as create operational efficiencies for police and, importantly, for our courts, and it will give police and law enforcement partners the tools that they need to respond and to keep our communities safe.

Deputy Speaker, thank you very much for your patience this morning. We certainly do have a very busy government business program ahead of us for the remainder of this week, and I look forward to the continued cooperation of those on the benches opposite and of course those around us in supporting the government’s agenda going forward. I commend the government business program to the house.

Ms STALEY (Ripon) (13:58): I rise to speak on the government business program motion in the name of the Leader of the House. I can advise that on this occasion we will not be supporting this motion. We do so because we asked for a bill to go into consideration in detail and, as is often the case, that was not provided by the government.

I note that the Leader of the House in her contribution to this debate mentioned a couple of times that this week we would have four bills for debate and consideration. We will certainly be having them for debate, but the Liberals and Nationals did ask to go into consideration in detail on the Casino Legislation Amendment (Royal Commission Implementation and Other Matters) Bill 2022 because there are things about that bill. We would like to ask some questions and perhaps move an amendment. But I understand the Leader of the House, as is her practice and that of her predecessor, asked the Minister for Consumer Affairs, Gaming and Liquor Regulation, and the minister in this case, the member for Williamstown, I believe, declined the opportunity to go into consideration in detail on the Casino Legislation Amendment (Royal Commission Implementation and Other Matters) Bill 2022, which is a pity. We do think that consideration in detail should be more the rule than the exception,

and certainly under this government it is absolutely the exception. I think we have done it twice in this Parliament, and yet we ask—

Business interrupted under sessional orders.

Questions without notice and ministers statements

HEALTH SYSTEM

Mr GUY (Bulleen—Leader of the Opposition) (14:01): My question is to the Minister for Health. With new government data showing that 7700 Victorians were removed from the elective surgery waitlist from April to June, just some of the 26 000 people who have dropped off that list over the past year due to—

Ms Allan: On a point of order, Speaker, I am sure the Leader of the Opposition would appreciate the Minister for Health being able to respond to his question. I think she will be in the chamber shortly, so if we could just give one more minute. I think the bells caught us—

Mr Walsh: Talk amongst ourselves.

Ms Allan: Yes, can we do that? Thank you for your indulgence.

The SPEAKER: Order! Leader of the Opposition.

Mr GUY: Thank you, Speaker. I thank the Deputy Premier for her assistance in this matter. It is most unique.

My question is to the Minister for Health. New government data shows that 7700 Victorians were removed from the elective surgery waitlist from April to June this year, just some of the 26 000 people who have dropped off that list over the past year due to a number of reasons, including surgery being declined, the patient seeking treatment interstate or, tragically, having died waiting. Can the minister inform us just how many of those 26 000 Victorians were removed from this waiting list over the past 12 months because, tragically, they have passed away waiting for their surgery that did not happen?

Ms THOMAS (Macedon—Minister for Health, Minister for Ambulance Services) (14:03): I thank the member for his question, but I need to draw his attention to some errors and assumptions in his question that need to be challenged. The first is that this is not new data. What the Leader of the Opposition has done is just add up existing data that is available in our quarterly reporting that is of course delivered by the Victorian Agency for Health Information. Unlike those on the other side of the house, our government is committed to transparency in reporting the health performance data in a transparent and accessible way. This data has now been available for quite some time, and it would appear that the Leader of the Opposition has gone and got someone in his office to add up this readily available data and come here today as if it is something new. Well, there is nothing new in that. The second point that I need to make is that here in Victoria, and indeed if the Leader of the Opposition had a closer look he would learn, we are very proud to be able to treat those category 1 patients—that is, the sickest patients on the list. Almost 100 per cent of all of those patients are treated within the clinically recommended guideline, which is within 30 days of surgery.

Mr Guy: Speaker, on a point of order, on relevance, as the minister says she is committed to transparency on reporting. Those figures do report, as the minister stated, the point that I asked her in the question, that is, to outline just how many of the figures the minister has referred to include people who have tragically passed away waiting for surgery that never occurred. I ask if the minister could be brought back to answering that straightforward question.

The SPEAKER: A point of order is not an opportunity to repeat the question. The Minister for Health was being relevant.

Ms THOMAS: Thank you very much, Speaker. I might point out that I am certainly not aware that the Leader of the Opposition is also the coroner. The cause of death of anyone on a waitlist in a hospital

is a matter for the coroner. The point that I made is the most critically ill patients, those who are category 1, are treated within the clinically recommended guideline.

Mr GUY (Bulleen—Leader of the Opposition) (14:05): Of the 87 000 Victorians currently sitting on the elective surgery waitlist, how many Victorians does the government then forecast may tragically die over the next 12 months because their vital surgery will not happen in time to save their lives?

Ms THOMAS (Macedon—Minister for Health, Minister for Ambulance Services) (14:06): I will make the point yet again: category 1 patients, the sickest patients, requiring planned surgery are treated within the clinically recommended guideline for almost 100 per cent of all patients. There is a handful of patients who may not be treated within that time frame but in fact have their surgery on day 31 or 32 or 33 for a handful of exceptional reasons. The suggestions that the Leader of the Opposition is making are not founded in fact. They are scaremongering and they are playing politics, where we will put patients first.

MINISTERS STATEMENTS: HEALTHCARE WORKERS

Mr ANDREWS (Mulgrave—Premier) (14:07): I am delighted to rise to update the house and indeed all Victorians on ways in which the government is supporting our nurses and midwives. Over these last 2½ years our health professionals and indeed our whole public hospital team have demonstrated—some of us did not need to be reminded—to all Victorians that they are the best of us. Their skill level, their compassion, their courage and their character are just immense. It is amazing the job that they have done, the job that they did pre COVID and the job they will do in the years to come. But it is really important to acknowledge that they have been under significant pressure, and the biggest thing and the best way to say thank you is to give them an extra pair of helping hands. That is why this year's budget had the recruitment and training of some 7000 additional healthcare workers; fully 5000 of those are nurses and midwives.

On Sunday I was very pleased to join with the Minister for Health and a number of nurses and midwives, who were very happy to receive the news that we will, in an Australian first, provide full scholarships for 10 000 undergraduate nurses—no HECS debt—provided they come and work in the Victorian public hospital system. There is funding to help enrolled nurses upgrade their skills to become registered nurses free of charge, and pathways for nurses to become specialists in oncology, in paediatrics and in intensive care. The list goes on and on: extra midwives, extra nurse practitioners, proper support—a comprehensive package. It is a package that not only says thank you but what it really says is this: if you are in year 11 or year 12 and you are thinking about nursing, now is the time to enrol. Now is the time to join the Victorian public hospital system. Be valued, be respected and get to do challenging but deeply rewarding work. Do not just have a job, do not just have a career, have a calling, and you can do that with legislated nurse-to-patient ratios. You can do that why? Because there is a Labor government in Victoria.

HEALTH SYSTEM

Mr WALSH (Murray Plains) (14:09): My question is to the Minister for Health. Earlier this year I met with 67-year-old now pensioner Phil Strickland from Mildura, who has required a knee replacement for three years. He requires walking sticks to get around and, fed up with waiting, with his greatly diminished living standard, he borrowed \$28 000 to have the procedure completed in South Australia in May this year. I ask the minister: how has it come to this, that a Victorian like Phil is being failed by the state's elective surgery delays and being forced to borrow money and get procedures done interstate because the Andrews government has failed patients so badly in Victoria?

Ms THOMAS (Macedon—Minister for Health, Minister for Ambulance Services) (14:10): I thank the member for Murray Plains for his question. I might make the point, while I am on my feet, that the member for Murray Plains raised an incident, or a patient, last time that Parliament sat, and I invited him to provide me with details. Those details are yet to be forthcoming. But let me say this: obviously waiting for category 2 or category 3 surgery can be uncomfortable—I am not going to shy away from

that—but once again I will make the point that decisions around the planned surgery waitlist are taken on the acuity of the condition with which the patient presents, and these are decisions made by clinicians. Every person on a waitlist here in Victoria is being actively managed. But let me say this: we know that our state, like every state around the nation—indeed confirmed for us this morning by the Premier for New South Wales, who also made the point—has been impacted by COVID, and it has had a significant impact on planned surgeries. Here in Victoria we have a \$1.5 billion COVID catch-up plan in place to tackle our planned surgery waitlist. I make this point: two of the most significant and exciting reforms and initiatives as a consequence of this investment—

Mr Andrews: ‘A socialist manoeuvre’.

Ms THOMAS: Yes, some might call it ‘a socialist manoeuvre’; I say it is about treating patients. We have purchased two private hospitals in order to deliver 15 000 additional surgeries every year—15 000.

Mr Walsh: On a point of order, Speaker, on the issue of relevance, I asked the minister: how has it come to this, that a Victorian has to go interstate to get a knee replacement that they have waited three years for? I ask you to bring the minister back to answering that question, please.

Members interjecting.

The SPEAKER: Order! Member for Frankston! A point of order is not an opportunity to repeat the question. The minister was being relevant.

Ms THOMAS: I will make one final point in relation to this. No-one is paying \$28 000 in our public health system. Our public health system provides services free of charge to people based on their acuity. Some people might make choices around private health insurance, and they are decisions for them to make. Once again, the member can send me the details—and he can send me the details of the patient who he raised last time in this place.

Mr WALSH (Murray Plains) (14:13): While I can report that Phil’s physical health has improved from getting his surgery in South Australia, the financial strain of now owing \$28 000 to get his surgery completed interstate has put an added burden on him and is affecting his mental health. How many of the 26 000 Victorians who were removed from the elective surgery waiting list over the last 12 months did that because they were forced to seek more reliable healthcare options overseas?

Ms THOMAS (Macedon—Minister for Health, Minister for Ambulance Services) (14:14): The question from the member for Murray Plains is based entirely on conjecture. Let me say this of the people removed from the waitlist: these are decisions that are made by clinicians, and they are made for a range of reasons, including that the patient and the clinician have sought or the patient is receiving alternative care, helping resolve the issue for which they first presented.

MINISTERS STATEMENTS: SUBURBAN RAIL LOOP

Ms ALLAN (Bendigo East—Minister for Transport Infrastructure, Minister for the Suburban Rail Loop, Minister for Commonwealth Games Delivery) (14:15): Only the Andrews Labor government is getting on and delivering the Suburban Rail Loop, and let me tell you why. Alongside the benefits that come with thousands of extra jobs and better connections, I am delighted to update the house on the travel time savings the Suburban Rail Loop will bring to the suburbs of Melbourne. For example, you could be a student in Hawthorn and want to study at Monash University, the biggest university in Australia. You will save up to 80 minutes a day on that trip on the Suburban Rail Loop, because only the Suburban Rail Loop will deliver that long-awaited-for train line to Monash University. A nurse in Croydon will save up to 80 minutes a day getting to the Victorian Heart Hospital. A cleaner in Sandringham will save an hour getting across to Deakin University in Burwood. And a grandparent in Gippsland will save an hour on a return trip to Box Hill to help look after the grandkids.

That is why Deakin University, Monash University, every council along the Suburban Rail Loop east corridor and councils in Gippsland support the Suburban Rail Loop—because it makes sense and will make a real difference to where people live and how they travel around the state. Without the Suburban Rail Loop Victorians know they will be condemned to sit in traffic for decades to come. That is why our government is continuing to invest, building the hospitals that treat patients and employ nurses, and building better transport connections to keep our city and state moving. Simply, governments can and should do both. That is what being in government is about, and only the Andrews Labor government will keep on doing both. (*Time expired*)

HEALTH SYSTEM

Mr GUY (Bulleen—Leader of the Opposition) (14:17): My question is to the Minister for Health. Recently the example of an 83-year-old stroke victim who was forced to wait for 17 hours outside in the middle of the Melbourne winter in a tent was brought to public attention. Paramedics told the media that the situation was akin to—their words—‘Guantánamo Bay’. Can the minister advise why government policy, which forced a stroke victim to wait outside in a tent for 17 hours is, in the minister’s words, an ‘appropriate’ level of care?

Ms THOMAS (Macedon—Minister for Health, Minister for Ambulance Services) (14:17): I thank the Leader of the Opposition for his question, which again, like so many of his questions in this place, is based on conjecture and not fact. I inquired in relation to this story. I was very concerned about what I had read, and I inquired at the hospital to ensure that appropriate care had been given. This was confirmed for me by the hospital. I make this point: this person at no stage has given permission for any of the details of her case to be talked about in this way. You might recall the person that brought this to the media’s attention herself chose to be anonymous. I made inquiries to the hospital because I was concerned about what I had read, but I will say this too: we have worked throughout the pandemic with our healthcare workers, and we have taken up the initiatives and the ideas that they have brought forward in order to continue the best of care during the most difficult and complex time faced by our healthcare system. The ambulance off-load provisions have been one of those initiatives brought to us by healthcare workers, brought to us in order to make sure that ambulances can get back on the road as quickly as possible, responding to urgent priority 1 000 calls. Again, I made the inquiries. I was satisfied with the response. This incident relates to a person who at no time has given any permission for her identity or photograph to be shared.

Mr GUY (Bulleen—Leader of the Opposition) (14:19): It has been reported that 14 hospital emergency departments have tents set up outside them to deal with the crisis in the system. I ask the minister: how many patients who should be receiving care inside a hospital emergency department have instead been left waiting in those makeshift tents outside Victorian hospitals?

Ms THOMAS (Macedon—Minister for Health, Minister for Ambulance Services) (14:20): Once again we see the Leader of the Opposition attacking healthcare workers, attacking the initiatives that they have suggested, that they asked government to support them to put in place in order to tackle some of the challenges that our health system has faced as a consequence of the pandemic. Only our government has a \$12 billion pandemic repair plan that we are implementing right now—backing our workforce, getting behind them, recruiting more of them and ensuring that we can continue to deliver world best care in Victoria.

MINISTERS STATEMENTS: HEALTH SYSTEM

Ms THOMAS (Macedon—Minister for Health, Minister for Ambulance Services) (14:21): I rise today to update the house on how the Andrews Labor government is expanding priority primary care services to ease the unprecedented demand on our health system. This morning I was pleased to join our Premier as well as the New South Wales Premier, Dom Perrottet, for this fantastic announcement at the Austin Hospital. We know how important getting the right care at the right time is, not just for patients and families but to help reduce the burden and the strain that our health system has been experiencing. That is why we are increasing the number of priority primary care centres here in

Victoria to 25. These centres are creating another option beyond the emergency department, easing some of the pressure on hospitals and healthcare workers. They will free up capacity for emergency departments while providing people with the care that they need.

As the two biggest states we are working together and leading the way to protect and support our health systems. Each state will establish 25 priority primary care services. Each of these will see 300 patients a week. We will do this in partnership with primary health networks, hospitals and general practitioners. These centres will have extended opening hours seven days a week for up to 16 hours a day. From the Austin Hospital to Albury Wodonga Health and Ballarat to Box Hill, we are working to deliver these priority primary care centres across our state. After years of neglect by the former coalition government the states are stepping in to fill the void that was created by underinvestment in general practice. These clinics will have everything that Victorians need like X-rays, medicine and pathology. We are doing this while also delivering the Suburban Rail Loop because governments must do both. We are not about politics. We are about patients and delivering for all Victorians. *(Time expired)*

MINISTERIAL INTEGRITY

Dr READ (Brunswick) (14:23): My question is for the Premier. In Queensland ministers are required to publicly report portfolio-related meetings and events every month. In New South Wales the diaries of ministers are made public every three months. But Victorians do not get to see who a minister is meeting and who they are not meeting in the lead-up to important decisions, so we do not get to see how power and influence are wielded in this state. Requiring ministers to publish diary summaries does not require legislation. The Premier could simply direct that it be done, so will the Premier do so?

Members interjecting.

Mr ANDREWS (Mulgrave—Premier) (14:23): I thank the member for Brunswick for his question. I got some assistance from behind me here, I have got some assistance over here from the National Party. The member for Brunswick will be pleased to know I am not going to use any of that material in responding to his question because his question is a serious one. It is about probity; it is about integrity and all of those issues, and I do not doubt for a moment his commitment to those matters. All I would say to the member for Brunswick is this: there are a number of matters that are before integrity agencies at the moment, and it is the government's expectation that some of this material will be canvassed and covered and may be the subject of recommendations that will be made by those agencies. We are appropriately awaiting those reports, and we will respond in due course.

Dr READ (Brunswick) (14:24): I thank the Premier for his answer. The people of New South Wales and Queensland have had access to ministerial diaries for years. It is a basic level of ministerial probity. For some reason Victoria has not had access to this—long before those inquiries began. There is nothing in opening diaries that requires an integrity agency to rule upon. It is something that could be decided this afternoon and enacted tomorrow. Is there any good reason to wait for an integrity agency to advise us to do so?

Mr ANDREWS (Mulgrave—Premier) (14:25): I thank the member for Brunswick for his supplementary question. The issue is not advanced by a quarrel. I would simply say to the member for Brunswick that I am not aware of what those integrity agencies will in fact recommend.

A member interjected.

Mr ANDREWS: Goodness me! For the benefit of the honourable member opposite, I will clear it up. We think there is every chance, given some of the work they are doing, that they will make recommendations about these issues. Have I got those recommendations? No. Will I wait for those recommendations? Yes. Y-E-S. Is it clear now?

A member interjected.

Mr ANDREWS: It is not, apparently. I do not know if I can do any better than that. I have tried as hard as I can to clear it up for you, mate, but I am sorry, we will wait to see pertinent, potentially relevant, recommendations. They might not just apply to ministers; they might apply to shadow ministers as well.

The SPEAKER: I ask members to direct their comments through the Speaker.

MINISTERS STATEMENTS: EDUCATION FUNDING

Ms HUTCHINS (Sydenham—Minister for Education, Minister for Women) (14:26): I rise to update the house on another exciting milestone for the 2023 new schools program. After a recent appointment of the final of the 12 new principals, last week I had the absolute privilege to announce the names of these 12 new schools set to open their doors from day one, term 1, in 2023. It is exciting to be one step closer to these new schools opening for thousands of new students in our fastest growing areas as part of our promise to open 100 new schools across Victoria by 2026. I know that these local communities are very excited because almost 5000 people engaged in the naming process, making submissions about the best names for their local schools, and many of those were taken from Aboriginal language for both flora and fauna. Having families and young people connected to their local schools is so vital and having families as part of the process is really important.

Since 2014 the Andrews Labor government has invested more than \$12.8 billion in building new schools and upgrading 1850 school facilities, creating around 17 400 new jobs in construction and associated industries. There are new classrooms, new gyms, new sporting fields, new libraries, new administration hubs and, most importantly, new toilet blocks. You name it, we have done it. Wider corridors, accessible play spaces and therapeutic gym equipment make mainstream schools more inclusive for all students of all abilities.

We committed to opening 100 new schools by 2026, and I am extremely proud to update the house that this work is now well ahead of schedule, with 75 new schools opening by 2024. And we can do it all whilst we are supporting our healthcare system to recover from the pandemic. Can I also acknowledge the work of the previous Minister for Education, the member for Monbulk, for his tremendous work in this space.

AMBULANCE SERVICES

Mr WALSH (Murray Plains) (14:28): My question is to the Minister for Ambulance Services. Recently Judith from Cunningham Downs retirement village in Echuca had a fall, fracturing her hip. An ambulance was called at 2.30 pm, which did not arrive until 8.45 pm—a very painful wait for Judith of over 6 hours. How is it acceptable an elderly woman was forced to lie in pain for over 6 hours waiting for an ambulance from a station located just 6 kilometres away?

Ms THOMAS (Macedon—Minister for Health, Minister for Ambulance Services) (14:29): I thank the member for Murray Plains for his question in relation to Judith and her experience of waiting for an ambulance in Echuca. As those on the other side know, what we have seen is that we have just come off the busiest quarter ever, with the highest demand ever for our ambulance services. Our paramedics have been working around the clock to deliver the vital services, the life-saving services, that we expect them to and that Victorians deserve.

But the member for Murray Plains can ask this question while at the same time deriding the initiatives that ambulance paramedics have asked us to put in place, which of course include the ambulance off-load centres that we have established at 14 of the busiest hospitals across the state. These off-load teams are designed to ensure that we can get ambulances back on the road as quickly as possible, responding to 000 emergencies—I might make this point too—as I said, at the busiest time for our ambulances ever. Our government have been investing in ambulance services since we were first elected, and indeed prior to the pandemic we had the best response times on record. The pandemic has impacted our times here in Victoria, just as it has impacted response times in New South Wales, in

South Australia, in Queensland and right around the world. But here in Victoria we continue to recruit and train ambos. I was very proud, not that long ago actually, to join the Premier when we welcomed some of the more than 404 new recruits that are on the road now with our ambulance services. Indeed it was great to see that we have got ambos now being sent out across the Barwon south-west region—Ocean Grove, Hamilton and Torquay; in the Gippsland region in—

Mr Walsh: On a point of order, Speaker, on the issue of relevance, can I ask you to bring the minister back to answering the question about Judith in Echuca, which has nothing to do with the south-west coast? It is a long, long way away from Echuca. Could she please come back to answering the issue around Judith and why she could not get an ambulance?

The SPEAKER: The minister has strayed a little from the question that was asked. I do ask her to come back to the question.

Ms THOMAS: Thank you very much, Speaker. Let me make this point: of these new recruits I am also delighted that 34 will join the Loddon Mallee region, including in Mildura, Swan Hill and indeed in Gisborne as well. So our government will continue to back in our ambulance service by making sure that we are continuing to recruit and train paramedics and we are continuing to implement strategies that enable them to off-load their patients into the care of nurses and paramedics at our health services in order to get them back on the road as quickly as possible.

Mr WALSH (Murray Plains) (14:32): With country ambulances being called to work closer to Melbourne or other major regional cities due to shortages and the requirement to backfill into those areas, why is country Victoria being left with limited ambulance services or, in some cases, no ambulance service, because the Andrews government has failed to adequately invest in country health for the last eight years?

Ms THOMAS (Macedon—Minister for Health, Minister for Ambulance Services) (14:33): I thank the member for his question. I want the house to understand that our government takes investment in ambulance services, investment in our paramedic workforce and the delivery of emergency care to all Victorians very, very seriously. It is why we have recruited more than 2000 additional paramedics. Indeed we have more and better paramedics at work here today in Victoria than anywhere else in the nation. Victorians well remember what we inherited from those on the other side. They were at war with our paramedics, and we had the worst response times in the history of this state.

MINISTERS STATEMENTS: MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

Ms WILLIAMS (Dandenong—Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Treaty and First Peoples) (14:34): I rise to update the house on the Andrews Labor government's work to deliver more mental health beds across Victoria. The royal commission told us we urgently need more acute mental health facilities across our state, and we have not wasted a single day in getting that done. We have invested \$492 million to deliver an additional 144 beds, providing more support for people who need it, when they need it, closer to home. Once complete these new beds will provide more than 43 000 days of care and allow 2500 more Victorians to access vital mental health services every year.

Last week I stopped by the Royal Melbourne Hospital to check out its construction of 22 brand new mental health beds. And guess what? While construction is getting underway on these beds at the Royal Melbourne, it is also underway at Sunshine and Epping and nearly complete in Geelong. And separately but at the same time, works are busily progressing underneath the Royal Melbourne on the Metro Tunnel and the brand new Parkville station, which they were keen to tell me was going to be very useful to their patients and workers, because on this side of the house we can build world-class mental health facilities and world-class transport facilities at the same time so that visitors, staff and patients alike can easily access these world-class facilities. This work is also being supported by a massive expansion to our mental health workforce at the same time. From free TAFE to free degrees, we are making sure we have the nurses and mental health practitioners we need to provide world-class care right here in Victoria.

CONSTITUENCY QUESTIONS

Tuesday, 30 August 2022

Legislative Assembly

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When it comes to the mental health and wellbeing system, we have a plan—an infrastructure plan, a workforce plan, a sustainable funding plan. Those opposite have one plan: cuts. They will cut up the Suburban Rail Loop, cut off suburbs— *(Time expired)*

Mr Wells: On a point of order, Speaker, I have two unanswered questions: 6334 about waiting times at Dandenong Hospital and 6370 about delays at the Monash hospital. I would appreciate it if you would follow them up.

The SPEAKER: Those questions will be followed up.

Ms Vallence: On a point of order, Speaker, I am also following up an overdue adjournment for the Minister for Housing, asked 96 days ago: adjournment 6388, asking about housing affordability and accessibility in the Yarra Ranges and the homelessness crisis we are experiencing.

The SPEAKER: The question will be followed up.

Mr D O'Brien: On a point of order, Speaker—and I have raised this one with you before—I am still waiting on a response to question 6561, which is now overdue.

The SPEAKER: The question will be followed up.

Dr Read: On a point of order, Speaker, I have some unanswered questions on notice and an adjournment matter—quite a number of them. I would be happy to just supply the numbers to the Clerk.

The SPEAKER: Provide them to the Clerk. They will be followed up.

Constituency questions

RIPON ELECTORATE

Ms STALEY (Ripon) (14:37): (6496) My question is to the Minister for Health, and I ask: will she commit to upgrading the St Arnaud campus of East Wimmera Health Service, the Beaufort campus of Beaufort and Skipton Health Service and the Daylesford campus of Central Highlands Rural Health so that Ripon's people get access to modern, fit-for-purpose facilities? I have many health facilities in Ripon in dire need of upgrades. I particularly note that St Arnaud is not fit for purpose. The Liberals and Nationals have committed \$30 million to upgrading the St Arnaud campus and providing for stage 1 of their master plan. I know that the Beaufort and Skipton Health Service is also seeking funding, as is of course the Daylesford community. The health minister should get on and upgrade the health services in rural communities that desperately need them.

ST ALBANS ELECTORATE

Ms SULEYMAN (St Albans) (14:38): (6497) My question is to the Minister for Health, and my question is: how will the newly announced priority primary care centre near Sunshine Hospital benefit the local community in my electorate of St Albans? I am very proud to see our government did not waste a moment in delivering the brand new Joan Kirner Women's and Children's Hospital, and just recently we opened the multistorey emergency department at Sunshine Hospital. We have invested in Sunshine Hospital, we have invested in mental health and we have seen landmark developments that so many local families in my community have access to each day. The priority primary care centre at Sunshine Hospital continues this strong record of investment, and we know how important it is to have access to the best health system locally within the health precinct of St Albans, where we have the opportunity to have the Joan Kirner Women's and Children's Hospital and the best health.

GIPPSLAND EAST ELECTORATE

Mr T BULL (Gippsland East) (14:40): (6498) My question is to the Attorney-General, and the information I seek is: what is being done to address the delays in the working with children check approval process? I have a constituent who applied for a working with children check over three months ago. It is still listed on the website as pending, and when this constituent rings the office the

phone just rings out, so the office is either undermanned or for some reason understaffed to the degree that it is not able to assist people with their inquiries. So I would please ask for the Attorney-General to explain what is being done. This constituent is not the only person who is experiencing these delays. It has cost them job opportunities. They have missed out on the ability to go back to work, and it needs to be addressed as a matter of urgency.

FRANKSTON ELECTORATE

Mr EDBROOKE (Frankston) (14:40): (6499) My constituency question is for the Minister for Community Sport, and I ask what can be done regarding the Frankston and District Basketball Association facility, which is clearly bursting at the seams and unable to keep up with huge demand now and what is actually predicted for the future. The Frankston and District Basketball Association, which is also the 2022 Victorian association of the year, is one of three basketball associations in Victoria, with 15 000 games scheduled a year, a staggering 900 teams and over 8000 participants. The competition has boomed, with 5000 participants in 2013, rising to an incredible 8300 participants in 2019. Concept designs for a new stadium are available and include two new multisport basketball courts, fully redeveloped courts 7 and 8, refurbishment works to bring courts up to code, improved entrances and mezzanine spectator viewing. I know basketballers young and old are asking what can be done regarding the FDBA facility, which is bursting at the seams, and would love feedback from the minister.

WARRANTDYTE ELECTORATE

Mr R SMITH (Warrandyte) (14:41): (6500) My constituency question is to the Minister for Community Sport. I have recently written to the minister outlining the North Ringwood junior football and cricket clubs' request for funding to create a master plan for their clubrooms at North Ringwood Reserve. North Ringwood Junior Football Club and North Ringwood Cricket Club are two great local sporting clubs that boast a growing number of teams for men and women and boys and girls of various ages. Unfortunately the current changing room conditions are far from adequate and require a rebuild to ensure a private and safe space for members to change, particularly at the times when the junior male and female games cross over. The creation of a master plan would allow these clubs to work with Maroondah council to ensure that the change rooms and clubrooms appropriately serve the clubs today and into the future. I want to put on the record my full support for this request, so my question for the minister is: can she provide information to me as to what funding opportunities are available for the creation of the master plan?

TARNEIT ELECTORATE

Ms CONNOLLY (Tarneit) (14:42): (6501) My question is for the Minister for Health and Minister for Ambulance Services. Last weekend our government made an amazing announcement—a \$14.3 million package to establish and fund five new primary care centres. We know that our emergency departments are currently very, very busy, and this is something our government is committed to working tirelessly to improve, with a \$12 billion investment in our health system, the largest in any Victorian budget, training the staff we need to cope with current and future demands. But what this surge in emergency department presentations has done is tell another story. We are struggling to get enough GPs, or rather there are not enough GPs offering bulk-bill visitations, which deters people from seeking the medical assistance they need and sends them straight to the ED—something we are trying to avoid. Five hospitals will be receiving the primary care centres, including Sunshine Hospital in Melbourne's west, designed to further ease pressure on our EDs, and just today another 10 in Victoria have been announced. So my question— (*Time expired*)

SHEPPARTON ELECTORATE

Ms SHEED (Shepparton) (14:44): (6502) My constituency question is for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety. Constituents are constantly telling me about the poor state of our regional roads and especially the Shepparton alternate route from Ford Road to Knights Road and from Channel Road to

Poplar Avenue. Trucks use this route constantly. It is a main thoroughfare for trucks around the city of Shepparton. It is now full of potholes. There is so much damage down the side of each road. There are very limited shoulders on either side of the road, so vehicles have very little opportunity to avoid the potholes and damage that is there. Of course that causes damage to vehicles, and it seriously runs the risk of accidents occurring. So much of the road has now been reduced to a 40-kilometre speed limit because of the damage. This is unacceptable, and the question I ask is: what will the government do to address this serious issue?

NARRE WARREN SOUTH ELECTORATE

Mr MAAS (Narre Warren South) (14:45): (6503) My question is for the Minister for Fishing and Boating and concerns the fish stocking program. Minister, how will the fish stocking program benefit my electorate of Narre Warren South? I recently had the pleasure of catching up with the minister at the stocking of the Berwick Springs lake in my electorate, and it was good to see the work of the Victorian Fisheries Authority up close, which aims to improve recreational fishing opportunities and the recovery of threatened species. The weather on the day was not the best, but Berwick Springs lake, as always, was still a beautiful community space. I would appreciate any further information that the minister can provide on the fish stocking program and how this will benefit my electorate, and I look forward to sharing the minister's response with my community.

ROWVILLE ELECTORATE

Mr WELLS (Rowville) (14:45): (6504) My question is to the Minister for Roads and Road Safety. Minister, what date has VicRoads scheduled to fix the appalling road conditions on Napoleon, Wellington and Lysterfield roads in Rowville? Drivers are reporting damaged wheels and tyre rims from deep holes in the road. Drivers have no room whatsoever to drive around potholes without risking an accident. My office emailed the minister in April about the danger, but his reply gave no indication of when the resurfacing work would be done. Now it is the end of winter, and in the words of another resident, 'Napoleon Road is a disgrace'. More than three years ago the federal government pledged \$50 million to fix congestion on Napoleon Road. If the state government stopped playing politics and built this section of road properly, then there would be no need for ad hoc repairs. I urge the government to stop gambling on road safety and upgrade these roads immediately.

BURWOOD ELECTORATE

Mr FOWLES (Burwood) (14:46): (6505) My constituency question is directed to the Minister for Early Childhood and Pre-Prep in the other place. Minister, how will my electorate of Burwood benefit from the announcement that the Andrews government will make kinder free from next year? For working families, childcare costs are a significant barrier to parents returning to the workforce. As a father of four, I understand the difficulties of childcare costs and the specific burden it places on women, as they still represent the overwhelming majority of primary caregivers. Returning to work or being a stay-at-home parent should be a decision made based on the needs of each family, not on the expense of the childcare system. I recently had the pleasure of joining the minister on a visit to Ringwood Uniting kindergarten and was delighted to spend time with the children, who were enjoying the benefits of an early childhood education. Many of those children are part of Burma's Chin community, an amazing community that gives so much to the east. I look forward to hearing from Minister Stitt about just how this investment into early childhood will lighten financial stress on young families and provide opportunities for parents to return to the workforce.

Business of the house

PROGRAM

Debate resumed.

Ms STALEY (Ripon) (14:48): I return to the government business program. I was noting that on this occasion we will be opposing the government business program because we had requested

consideration in detail for one bill and that has been denied. I also take the opportunity to note that we are at 10 to 3 on a Tuesday; normally this debate is held well before question time. It would have been more collegiate, and certainly faster, had we done it in an ordinary order, had this debate prior to question time and had that all finished away. Then the amendments to the Mental Health and Wellbeing Bill 2022 I think would have been dealt with in far less time than in fact we ended up taking, which was over an hour and a half.

It is just necessary to remind the government that they control the house of government in the Assembly but that does not mean that at every opportunity they should seek to ride roughshod over other members in this chamber. I would also note that the member for Shepparton—and she did this after I did today—and I both called for time to hold debate on a motion—just debate on a motion—to bring in general business. The member for Shepparton has attempted to move that motion many times, and I have also attempted to move it on behalf of the Liberals and Nationals many times, and leave is always denied. This is a government that just wants this chamber in particular to be out of step with other chambers in the commonwealth. Other chambers have a non-government business time where people can put motions and can in many cases introduce legislation—similar to what happens in the Council. The world does not end if non-government members get to have a voice, yet this government seems to believe that is the case.

Each week we have the government business program, and of course the core element of the government business program is that it comes as a pigeon pair with the guillotine on Thursday. So all of the bills that we are currently debating that will go on to the government business program will go to the guillotine on Thursday, whether their debate has been concluded, whether people want to go into consideration in detail—no matter what the circumstance is, we will go to the guillotine and vote on those bills. That is not normal practice in other parliaments. The House of Commons, for example, debates bills over many weeks. It is not normal to put them all to a guillotine. Yet every week this is what we get in this place as this government rams through its legislation in the minimum amount of time possible, and this is yet another example.

Mr FOWLES (Burwood) (14:51): The crocodile tears are gushing forth from those opposite today as they bleat about the amount of time being allocated for things and yet engage in the sort of political game playing and parliamentary shenanigans that frankly bore most of us to tears. It is an absurdity to be having this debate about the guillotine, for example, with the comparison drawn by the member for Ripon. The member for Ripon drew a parallel to the House of Commons, which I think at last call had about 450 members; I am unsurprised in those circumstances that it takes a little bit longer to get through some of the legislation.

They are crocodile tears because those opposite rarely fill the speaking opportunities that are allocated to them. The reality is that I and many of those on the government benches have frequently given our views on various bills in this place whilst the chamber was, frankly, empty but for the one shadow minister at the table. They have opportunities to speak on all these bills, and yet they do not—they do not bother. So this confected outrage, these crocodile tears, this tiresome repetition of ‘Oh, the government’s ramming through legislation’ even though they do not even take up the opportunity to debate that legislation—complaining about the guillotine when the guillotine, frankly, only serves to stop government members speaking on bills, not opposition members—is just bonkers. They do not even turn up, and if they do not even turn up, what right, frankly, do they have to say that it is outrageous that we guillotine debate if they are not even presenting for that debate?

The hypocrisy of those opposite today—they have just taken it up a massive level—the crocodile tears, the confected outrage, the silliness. It is just tedious in the extreme. It would benefit this house if they just cracked on and got on with the job. We appreciate that we are not going to agree on a whole bunch of things, and the opportunity is always there for those opposite to put their views about that. But you cannot on the one hand not take up the opportunities to put those views and on the other hand complain about not getting the opportunities to put those views. You simply have to pick a team. This hypocrisy is probably endemic in those opposite. It is certainly characteristic of those opposite that they would

seek to run this, frankly, peculiar argument whilst at the same time not even bothering to show up for the various debates. And it would also appear they did not even bother to use the 260 hours between the rising of the other place and the commencement of business this week to swot up a bit about what amendments were coming back.

It is unusual for this debate to be occurring after question time. It is unusual that we are having this sort of highly obstructionist approach from those opposite. I guess it is informed by the politics of an impending election rather than any sort of actual principle here. Certainly the outrage is as flimsy as the policy platform for those opposite. I think the chamber would be better served by them taking an adult and constructive view on these matters rather than carrying on like the pork chops that they are fast becoming. I commend this government business program to the house and hope that it is rewarded by a strong majority vote shortly.

Mr ROWSWELL (Sandringham) (15:00): I must say, I have been called a number of things in my life but a pork chop is not one of them, and I object to the member for Burwood suggesting that I am a pork chop, which I most certainly am not.

Mr T Bull: He's a lamb chop.

Mr ROWSWELL: Thank you, member for Gippsland East.

I also rise to speak on the government business program. I am but one voice in an 88-member Parliament, a Parliament where every single member of this place has been elected by their community to represent their community in this place, the very foundational institution of our democracy that this Parliament is. My view is that the member for Burwood has got it all wrong. We are opposing the government business program again this week because we have legitimately gone to the government asking for the government to go into consideration in detail on the Casino Legislation Amendment (Royal Commission Implementation and Other Matters) Bill 2022. I reiterate the point that I made the last time I contributed to a government business program debate, and that is that on the two occasions that this house has considered a bill in detail, it has actually been a really good process.

Mr T Bull: It's when it functions at its best.

Mr ROWSWELL: Exactly right—it is an example of the Parliament functioning at its absolute best. It is a doff of the cap; it is an example of the Westminster system of Parliament working at its absolute best. When ministers come into this place, they understand the legislation that they are bringing to this place for consideration and they understand the detail of the legislation that they are bringing to this place for consideration, which has the potential to be the law of this state. They are here. They are in this chamber. They are accountable to that through the questions that members of the opposition and members of the crossbench have the opportunity to ask. That is the process. That in this Parliament there have only been two occasions for that to take place absolutely baffles me; it really does baffle me. I understand that traditionally the upper house of a Parliament—in this case the Legislative Council, the other place—would ordinarily be known colloquially as a house of review. But that does not mean and that should not dismiss the fact that this house, that this chamber, the Legislative Assembly, also has the opportunity for that function, and it once again baffles me that this government is once again refusing the opposition that opportunity. Members of the opposition and members of the crossbench legitimately have a right to delve deep into questions relating to legislation that is brought before this chamber, and once again the government is denying us that opportunity.

This week we will shortly, after a readjustment of what we were expecting in the program today, reach the Early Childhood Legislation Amendment Bill 2022. The member for Croydon, my colleague, will lead that debate. I am looking forward to the member for Gippsland South's contribution and him leading on the casino legislation amendment bill. The member for Malvern will lead on the Major Crime and Community Safety Legislation Amendment Bill 2022. And this, which I think will be of interest to a lot of people, the Monitoring of Places of Detention by the United Nations Subcommittee on Prevention of Torture (OPCAT) Bill 2022, will be a ripsnorter, I am sure.

I also failed the last time I contributed to the debate on the government business program to acknowledge the elevation of the member for Buninyong to the position of Government Whip. I would like to do that and to say that I look forward to working with the member for Buninyong in the time of this Parliament that we have remaining. What I have tried to do as Opposition Whip in the time that I have been in this role is work collaboratively and cooperatively for the benefit of the chamber, the smooth running of the chamber, and I fully intend to do so with the member for Buninyong in her newly elevated role. I congratulate her on that appointment. We will, however, be opposing this government business program for the pretty good reasons I outlined at the start of my contribution.

Mr CHEESEMAN (South Barwon) (15:00): It is with some pleasure that I take the opportunity this afternoon to rise to make my contribution to the government's business program. I must say I have done so on quite a number of occasions through the course of this Parliament. For those that might be listening at home or on their TVs back in their offices, throughout the course of this particular Parliament it has been typical that we attempt as a government to pass through this chamber three to four pieces of legislation each and every sitting week. Indeed we have on more occasions than not very much done that.

It has been our custom and practice throughout the course of this term that we set in place a guillotine so that on a Thursday night at 5 o'clock we have the votes where necessary to ensure that legislation that was up for debate through the course of that sitting week makes its way from here at 5 o'clock or shortly thereafter to the Legislative Council (LC) to be debated in that chamber in the following sitting week. That has been our custom and practice. We have continued to do that, and I must say as a previous Government Whip more often than not the speakers lists—those making a contribution to the debate in those sitting weeks—have largely been filled by members of the government, usually with fairly low levels of contribution from the coalition parties to that debate. This has been the typical practice of this place, and I suspect that will be the circumstance in this particular week. This week is in so many ways reflective of what has happened in this chamber throughout the course of this Parliament.

In terms of this particular week we do have four pieces of legislation that we intend to put through this chamber, and we wish that legislation speedy passage through here and for it to make its way to the LC for the final sitting week of the year. I very much look forward to those pieces of legislation making their way to that chamber. In terms of the legislation that we have before us I particularly look forward to making my contribution on the Early Childhood Legislation Amendment Bill 2022, because I know so many of our communities have a large proportion of families. I think this legislation is particularly important to my community, and I have no doubt it is particularly important to most communities represented by Labor members of Parliament.

I look forward to hearing the many outstanding contributions this week by, I hope, a cross-section of representatives here in this chamber. I have no doubt that the Labor contributions, as always, will be on the money and reflective of the views of our community. We have had a little bit of a messy start to this sitting week, not through any action of the government but indeed through games being played by the coalition.

Mr McCURDY (Ovens Valley) (15:05): I rise to make a brief contribution on the government business program. I heard the member opposite say it is no fault of the government that we are here at 3 o'clock this afternoon and still have not got to discuss the government business program. The bullying and harassment that they have tried to do to this chamber is absolutely disgraceful. If they would just communicate and negotiate rather than trying to bulldoze their way through, they would find we would not be here at 5 past 3 on a Tuesday still trying to get on with the government business program. As you have heard from the Manager of Opposition Business, we are opposing this government business program because of the lack of respect for wanting to go into consideration in detail.

We have four bills this week. Obviously there is the Early Childhood Legislation Amendment Bill 2022. The member for Lowan will lead The Nationals in that, and who better to do that than someone with a couple of fine kids; she will understand early childhood like nobody else in this

MEMBERS STATEMENTS

Tuesday, 30 August 2022

Legislative Assembly

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chamber. The Casino Legislation Amendment (Royal Commission Implementation and Other Matters) Bill 2022 will be led by the member for Gippsland South. The Monitoring of Places of Detention by the United Nations Subcommittee on Prevention of Torture (OPCAT) Bill 2022 will also be discussed, and of course the member for Gippsland East will bring home the money on the Major Crime and Community Safety Legislation Amendment Bill 2022. As I say, there are four bills on this agenda, and I certainly look forward to contributing on the casino legislation amendment. As somebody on the Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation board I am very passionate about making sure that the casino and gambling in Victoria are well scrutinised and in great shape.

It is disappointing, again, that the government is not going into consideration in detail. I really thought that that might have been a significant step forward for us in the second-last sitting of this term as we nearly end the 59th Parliament. The new Leader of the House, who is an outstanding Leader of the House—certainly fairer, more reasonable and more understanding than the previous one—I thought might have had some more negotiation outcomes with our side. But anyway, it appears that that is not the case. With those brief comments, I will also be opposing the business program.

House divided on motion:

Ayes, 52

Addison, Ms
Allan, Ms
Blandthorn, Ms
Brayne, Mr
Brooks, Mr
Bull, Mr J
Carbines, Mr
Carroll, Mr
Cheeseman, Mr
Connolly, Ms
Couzens, Ms
Crugnale, Ms
D'Ambrosio, Ms
Dimopoulos, Mr
Donnellan, Mr
Edbrooke, Mr
Eren, Mr
Foley, Mr

Fowles, Mr
Fregon, Mr
Green, Ms
Halfpenny, Ms
Hall, Ms
Halse, Mr
Hamer, Mr
Horne, Ms
Hutchins, Ms
Kairouz, Ms
Kennedy, Mr
Kilkenny, Ms
Maas, Mr
McGhie, Mr
McGuire, Mr
Merlino, Mr
Neville, Ms

Pakula, Mr
Pallas, Mr
Pearson, Mr
Richards, Ms
Richardson, Mr
Scott, Mr
Settle, Ms
Spence, Ms
Staikos, Mr
Suleyman, Ms
Tak, Mr
Taylor, Mr
Theophanous, Ms
Thomas, Ms
Ward, Ms
Williams, Ms
Wynne, Mr

Noes, 28

Angus, Mr
Battin, Mr
Blackwood, Mr
Britnell, Ms
Bull, Mr T
Cupper, Ms
Guy, Mr
Hodgett, Mr
Kealy, Ms
McCurdy, Mr

McLeish, Ms
Morris, Mr
Newbury, Mr
Northe, Mr
O'Brien, Mr D
O'Brien, Mr M
Riordan, Mr
Rowswell, Mr
Ryan, Ms

Sheed, Ms
Smith, Mr R
Southwick, Mr
Staley, Ms
Tilley, Mr
Vallence, Ms
Wakeling, Mr
Walsh, Mr
Wells, Mr

Motion agreed to.

Members statements

HEALTH SYSTEM

Ms STALEY (Ripon) (15:14): I note that the independent Parliamentary Budget Office has had a look at the Cheltenham to Box Hill rail project, the suburban loop, and they have come to a few conclusions about it. The first and most important conclusion is that it does not stack up. The independent Parliamentary Budget Office has had a look and they have said that it is only going to

return 60 cents in the dollar for every dollar spent on it. My constituents in Ripon know that this project has never stacked up for them and will never deliver a single benefit to anybody in Ripon, and that is why they no doubt are delighted to know that an incoming Liberals and Nationals government will instead fix the health crisis. That will include rebuilding the St Arnaud hospital—\$30 million. We will do stage 1 of the master plan. We will put \$400 million into the Warragul hospital—a really needed facility. In Mildura there will be \$750 million to build a new Mildura hospital. In Wodonga there will be \$300 million as part of the full redevelopment of the Wodonga hospital. And let us not forget Shepparton—\$100 million into a cancer centre in Shepparton. Some of these will train nurses and doctors as well. We will fix the health crisis while the government will pursue a project that does not stack up.

MERRI-BEK

Ms BLANDTHORN (Pascoe Vale—Leader of the House, Minister for Planning) (15:15): I rise today to support Moreland City Council’s endeavours to change their name from Moreland to Merri-bek, ‘rocky country’ in the Woiwurrung language. Moreland council was named as such in 1994, when Jeff Kennett as Premier merged the LGAs of Brunswick, Coburg and Broadmeadows. The name ‘Moreland’ traces back to a Jamaican slavery plantation, and it was acquired from the name of a local property owned by Farquhar McCrae in the 1830s. He named his property after a family-run sugar plantation in Jamaica which operated using slave labour—indeed which facilitated the use of slave labour. The name ‘Moreland’ is offensive to many in our community who have a profound sense of social justice, and it does not reflect my community’s interconnectedness and proud multicultural heritage. The name of our council should be one that we are all proud of and one that does not stem from a racially prejudiced past, a name that allows us to deepen our connection with the traditional owners of our land and their history, allowing us to join with 11 other Melbourne councils the names of which have Indigenous language origins.

Merri-bek reflects my electorate and the broader local council area’s connection to the Merri Creek and the rocky earth landscape which makes up our local city council area. It pays respect to our natural landscape and even pays homage in a way to the social history of our community, from the bluestone quarry that now forms the Coburg Lake and the bluestone which was used in so many of our local laneways through to the building of Pentridge Prison. This is an opportunity for us to continue our path to healing, recognition and reconciliation.

V/LINE SERVICES

Mr T BULL (Gippsland East) (15:17): The latest V/Line train service performance figures that have been published show punctuality on the Bairnsdale line is sitting at 86.2 per cent, well below the 92 per cent target. East Gippsland residents are very reliant on that train service, using it to access medical appointments in the city and for work and educational purposes, and yet we are continually falling short of punctuality targets. I ask the minister to please explain why this is the case and what is being done to rectify the problem.

SOCIAL HOUSING

Mr T BULL: I also recently questioned the minister in relation to the frustratingly high amount of social housing premises that are lying vacant in my electorate of Gippsland East. The minister responded by saying there were 33 vacant social housing properties but only seven of those 33 were awaiting maintenance. That means there are 26 vacant social housing properties in existence in my area. The reason being given is, as the minister has said, that these premises are being held as part of the From Homelessness to a Home program. It is an oxymoron to hold back social housing residences from the homeless under a program that is aimed at assisting the homeless. These homes have been vacant for some time. We should hold them no longer, and we should have families in these vacant properties. I urge the minister to ensure that occurs.

IAN LAWREY

Mr McGHIE (Melton) (15:18): On behalf of the Melton community I would like to congratulate Mr Ian Lawrey on his well-deserved life membership of the Returned Services League Australia. Ian first joined the Melton RSL in 2008. He has served in many roles, including president from 2014 until 2022. Ian has amassed thousands of volunteer hours in his commitment to promoting veterans' recognition and welfare in the Melton community. Ian has been instrumental in bridging the once large gaps and adverse relations between the Vietnam Veterans Association Melton and the RSL. Ian used his position on the committee at the RSL as well as being a veteran of the Vietnam War to begin the process of forging new, positive relationships between the two organisations. Today the strong partnership between these organisations is testament to Ian's passion. I thank him for all his efforts and his dedication to both the RSL and the Vietnam Veterans Association over many, many years.

PETER CALNAN

Mr McGHIE: Two weeks ago a good paramedic friend of mine passed away suddenly. Peter Lawrence Calnan was a paramedic for over 35 years. He was a paramedic, a mobile intensive care ambulance paramedic, and became a duty team manager. He was only 58 years of age. Peter and I worked many shifts together at Sunshine ambulance station throughout the 1980s and 1990s. We had a lot of fun during our shifts, which I cannot talk about. He was heavily involved in the western suburbs ambulance social club. Peter always tried to support and look after his colleagues in many different ways, and he would have given the shirt off his back if he had to. Peter will be sadly missed by all. I extend my best wishes to his children, Ruby and Riley, his family, his friends and of course his paramedic family. Vale, Peter Lawrence Calnan.

ROUTE 75 TRAM

Mr WAKELING (Ferntree Gully) (15:20): I recently announced the Liberal Party's plan to finally do the study to extend tram route 75 to Knox. As the Knox community will remember, the Labor Party promised an extension of the tram to Knox in 1999. Twenty-three years later, nothing has been delivered by this government. On behalf of the Knox community, I raised this important issue with the government in this house, calling upon the Labor government to match the commitment of the Liberal Party to look at extending the tram along Burwood Highway through Ferntree Gully and along Mountain Highway to Bayswater, something that has been overwhelmingly supported by Knox residents. In response to this very important question, the minister has provided a response to me as the local member that the Labor Party will not be supporting this plan. So it is very clear that at the upcoming election only the Liberal Party will be committed to exploring the extension of the tram to Knox. We know that it is vitally important that we improve public transport services within the Knox community, and it is a shame that the Labor Party continues to reject the views of Knox residents. Only the Liberal Party will stand up for Knox residents when it comes to improving public transport.

LEVEL CROSSING REMOVALS

Mr FOWLES (Burwood) (15:21): Well, the season is upon us. I rise to voice my support for the level crossing removals at Dublin Road, Ringwood East, and Bedford Road, Ringwood, in the heart of my community. We all know the terrific work of the Andrews Labor government in this domain. We are getting on and removing dangerous and congested level crossings, getting the traffic flowing and the trains moving. Not one, not five, not 10 but 85 dangerous and congested level crossings are going for good. Those opposite said it was too ambitious and could never be done, but here we are, ahead of schedule and improving the lives of commuters right across our city, and Ringwood will not be missing out. Already level crossings at Blackburn, Nunawading, Mitcham and Heatherdale are gone. The next ones to go are at Bedford Road, Ringwood, and Dublin Road, Ringwood East.

On Friday the updated designs were released, and, boy, are they sensational. We are building a brand new East Ringwood station with all the bells and whistles, including a new forecourt connecting the station to the Railway Avenue shops and expanded car parking, with lighting, CCTV and accessibility

upgrades. At Bedford Road we are extending the Heathmont rail trail to Bedford Park, finally fixing this missing link that cyclists, joggers and walkers have long advocated for. We are planting thousands of new plants, shrubs and trees too, keeping the level crossing removals in character with the local neighbourhood and the lush greenery we all know and love. I have also been working hard with the Minister for Transport Infrastructure to ensure not a single public park or oval is used as a laydown area during construction, which I know is terrific news for my community.

I am excited for these crossings to be gone for good. Only an Andrews Labor government will get it done.

COLDSTREAM SPORTS PAVILION

Ms VALLENCE (Evelyn) (15:23): Coldstream residents and committee members of the Coldstream football, netball and cricket clubs were thrilled when I recently announced that Coldstream will score \$1 million towards the sports pavilion redevelopment if a Guy Liberal government is elected in November. It was my pleasure to surprise club president Ryan Kerr and the Coldstream community with this announcement at Coldstream in the final round of the home-and-away season. Grassroots sport is at the heart of local communities, and that is why we are backing the Coldstream community with this record investment. Coldstream is a wonderful community, and we have listened to the Coldstream locals, who are crying out for a new community and sporting hub to better enable the community to come together to keep physically active and mentally well.

The new multipurpose facilities will ensure better access for players and supporters, important for the greater female participation that is occurring at the Coldstream sports clubs, by delivering new female and male change rooms. It will provide a massive boost for the Coldstream Football & Netball Club, Coldstream women's football club, Coldstream junior football club, Coldstream Cricket Club and of course the Yarra Valley Darts Association. I would like to in particular pay tribute to the football and netball club president and committee—Ryan Kerr, Samantha Glassborow, Ash Rankin and Nathan Sargent and others—for their advocacy and determination to get these clubrooms redeveloped for the Coldstream community.

MYANMAR CAMPAIGN NETWORK

Mr TAK (Clarinda) (15:24): The Myanmar Campaign Network, MCN, is an Australian national coalition formed following the 2021 coup in Myanmar, comprising human rights organisations, international aid NGOs, Myanmar diaspora organisations and trade unions. I stand in solidarity with the network and its many activists, and I commend them for their courage and determination in striving for human rights, democracy and justice in Myanmar.

It has been 17 months since the February 2021 coup in Myanmar. The UN special rapporteur reported that, as of 1 April 2022, junta forces had killed at least 1600 civilians and displaced over 500 000. Half of the population has fallen into poverty, and the World Health Organization has projected over 47 000 preventable deaths in Myanmar this year, with some 13 million people facing food insecurity. We heard from the campaign network of unlawful arrests of elected officials, the use of lethal force against peaceful demonstrators, persecution of journalists, enforced disappearance and rape as a weapon of war, and the list of atrocities goes on.

As the leading democratic nation in the region, Australia must act. I echo the call for targeted sanctions on state- and military-owned enterprises in Myanmar and their subsidiaries as well as financial sanctions and travel and visa bans on military and other officials. I am looking forward to co-hosting the Myanmar Campaign Network—*(Time expired)*

DARTMOUTH DAM

Mr TILLEY (Benambra) (15:26): 'Look out below!'—that is the warning for people in our district as the Dartmouth Dam prepares to spill for the first time since 1996. The maths has it spilling on Thursday, but given the rain yesterday it could be at any moment. Last Wednesday there was

56 gigalitres of airspace in the dam. Five gigs were being released each day with an inflow of 12 gigs—that was flowing in. That is an extra seven gigs a day or, at that time, eight days before it goes over the top. I went to the dam last week, when the water was lapping at the top of the spillway. This is a massive dam. In figures it is about 3800 gigalitres, which is about seven Sydney Harbours. There is no space in Lake Hume downstream, so once this goes it will flood properties right along the Mitta and then they will be forced to release more water from Hume Dam, which in fact means the Murray River is next. We cannot make the mistake of the past, from 2016, which certainly springs to mind. We must give landholders time to move their stock and pumps. We need to give caravan parks time to shift to higher ground. Vital infrastructure—the main gas interconnector pipeline at Albury, the interstate power connector—and quarries need to be ready. You need to be on the right side of it, and certainly the government benches need to be ready and on call. Prior preparation prevents poor performance.

BALLARAT KERALITES FOUNDATION OF AUSTRALIA

Ms ADDISON (Wendouree) (15:27): On Saturday, 27 August, I had the great pleasure of attending the Ballarat Keralites Foundation of Australia's annual Onam festival with Labor candidate for Ripon Martha Haylett and more than 250 members. I would like to express my sincere gratitude to everyone for making us feel so welcome and thank the BKFA for their good work in our community. Congratulations to chair Sijo George, vice-chairs Diana Thomas and John Thomas, secretary Basil Joseph and the BKFA members for organising such a wonderful event. It was such a special experience for Martha and me to be addressed by Harika, Diana and Leena in the beautiful gold and linen saris. It was my first time wearing a sari, and I saw it as a sign of our deepening connection and friendship. I also thoroughly enjoyed the delicious traditional meal served and thank the 20 men under head chef Sanu Thomas who cooked throughout the night, preparing the traditional Onam feast. I was also incredibly impressed by the dance performance of 60 women and girls. Well done to Semina George on coordinating the Mega Thiruvathira.

The celebration of Onam and other cultural and religious festivals encourages community members from Kerala to retain and honour their cultural identity and heritage. It also provides an opportunity for the next and future generations to remain connected with their families' beliefs, values and traditions. I strongly believe these celebrations also strengthen and diversify our community's social fabric, making Ballarat an even better place to live.

COBRAM HOSPITAL

Mr McCURDY (Ovens Valley) (15:29): I rise again in this place to seek financial support from the Andrews Labor government to invest significant funds to upgrade the Cobram hospital. Years of spending on Melbourne projects have left this service on life support. Victoria is more than just Melbourne. It is time for regional healthcare investment, and Cobram hospital is one of those.

OVENS VALLEY ELECTORATE SPORTS FACILITIES

Mr McCURDY: Grassroots footy and netball are alive and well in Mount Beauty and Dederang. I watched a game recently as they fielded a team against Mitta. However, at a recent training night that I attended it was demonstrated how important the lighting is for these small community groups, and I urge the Victorian government to stop patting themselves on the back for Melbourne-based grants and upgrades and look a little further up the road to see that Victoria does not stop at Kalkallo. Dederang needs a power upgrade and new lights to assist junior and senior football—\$500 000 is not a big ask when you compare it with what they have been spending in Melbourne.

BRIGHT HEALTH CARE AND AGED CARE FUNDING

Mr McCURDY: Those who have been to Bright cannot help but be impressed by the beauty and splendour of that beautiful town—it has visitors galore and is a tourism destination other towns can only dream of—but health care and aged care are fading fast. The Victorian government must see beyond the tram tracks, must invest in growth towns and must support locals and tourists before it is too late—\$26 million is required to inject life into health care and aged care in Bright.

WANGARATTA COUNTRY WOMEN'S ASSOCIATION

Mr McCURDY: From recent discussions with the Wangaratta CWA it is apparent a new kitchen is needed to keep the scones coming. Our regional towns look to the CWA for support when in need, whether it is fires or floods, which are quite regular in the north-east. A kitchen upgrade is not too much to ask from the government for Melbourne.

MOUNT WAVERLEY SECONDARY COLLEGE

Mr FREGON (Mount Waverley) (15:30): It was fantastic to have the Minister for Education join me last week in visiting the Mount Waverley Secondary College senior campus and seeing the construction progress on the new STEAM centre. Construction on this terrific project commenced earlier this year; it is well and truly underway, with the foundations nearly complete. This STEAM centre, which will incorporate science, tech, engineering, arts and maths in one centralised hub for students, was announced by the Andrews Labor government back in the 2020–21 state budget in a \$7.15 million commitment to modernising Mount Waverley Secondary College. The STEAM centre forms part of stage 1 of our plan for Mount Waverley Secondary College and follows the Andrews Labor government's planning investment in 2020.

I am so proud to be part of a government that is investing record funding towards school infrastructure and ensuring every child in the Mount Waverley district has access to a great education. Thank you to college captains Azraf Ezaz and Charlotte Wilkes for taking me on a tour with the minister and to the many creative students who shared their outstanding technology projects. As someone with a background in tech I know just how critical creative and technical skills are to our future success. I would also like to extend a special thanks to our wonderful principal, Karen Wade, and her team for welcoming the minister and me to her wonderful school. It has been a pleasure working with them to deliver positive and visible results for the students of Mount Waverley. With spring and summer coming along I know that progress is going to increase because, as we all know, as the sun shines, the steam rises.

OLIVIA'S PLACE

Mr BLACKWOOD (Narracan) (15:32): Olivia's Place is a pregnancy and early parenting resource centre, now based in Drouin, catering to the needs of families across Gippsland. Originally set up to assist families in the Baw Baw shire, they now support clients from the local government areas of Latrobe, South Gippsland, Bass and Cardinia. Unfortunately their requests to the Andrews government for funding support have been ignored. They also receive little or no support from local government. This amazing organisation has supported over 250 families in the Latrobe shire since 2019. In the last financial year 196 families received help and referrals, and about 56 per cent of those families came from the Latrobe shire. Last Saturday night the annual gala was held by Olivia's Place, the first since COVID. The Baw Baw shire community have been extremely generous in their support for this event, with 300 attending and over \$40 000 raised.

It is so disheartening for the volunteers and trained staff to have to continually focus on their financial viability because governments do not assist. This is a shout-out not just to the Andrews government to do something but also to the local government organisations whose families benefit from the professional and much-needed services provided by Olivia's Place, in particular Latrobe shire, where more than 50 per cent of their clients receive social, emotional, practical and material support. It is just not fair for the community and businesses in Baw Baw shire to dig deep every year to ensure this very valuable service can continue. I congratulate the Baw Baw businesses and broader community for their ongoing generosity and urge the Latrobe shire to get on board for their families.

MARY SIMPSON

Ms GREEN (Yan Yean) (15:34): On 21 August the lights of Mernda and Doreen shone a little less brightly when my beautiful friend Mary Simpson took her last breath, aged 80. Mary was the youngest old lady that I have ever known. She was funny, cheeky, kind and thoughtful. She lived her own values

but did not harshly judge the values of others. I feel privileged to have shared so many of Mary's recent milestones. In June at Loyola College she and her devoted life partner, Val, celebrated 60 years of marriage. My husband, Michael, and I were delighted to see this still totally besotted couple recommit their marriage vows before Father Terry Bergin. They also joined me here at Parliament for a celebratory lunch.

At this year's annual Yan Yean International Women's Day dinner in March I was able to thank Mary for her devotion to our community over many decades. In December I joined Mary's family for her 80th birthday party. Son Sean and his family opened their Doreen home to Mary's many fans, daughter Terri, grandchildren, cousins, sister Kevine and many friends.

Mary was so proud of her husband, Val, especially when he was awarded an OAM for services to policing and to local government. She often spoke of Val's time in local government as a Diamond Valley councillor and as a pallbearer for Victoria's first female minister, Pauline Toner. Val and Mary moved back to the northern suburbs from the Bellarine Peninsula before the 2014 election. They approached me at my street stall in Mernda, and we had been firm friends ever since. They were integral to my last two campaigns. Mary's humour and cheekiness got me through many difficult days in those times. I have often said that I want to be Mary when I grow up. (*Time expired*)

MILDURA BASE PUBLIC HOSPITAL

Ms CUPPER (Mildura) (15:35): Saturday night before last, Mildura Base Public Hospital held its first major fundraiser in more than 20 years. The base's proud history of community fundraising came to an abrupt end in 1998 when our hospital was privatised by the then Liberal-National party coalition government. Following a hard-fought seven-year community campaign, on 15 September 2020 the Andrews government brought our hospital back into public hands, and we are eternally grateful for that. Since then the hospital foundation has raised more than \$1.6 million. The goodwill and passion that our community has for our hospital can be channelled into fundraising once again.

A highlight of the night was the launch of the KC Society in honour of the late great surgeon Kevin Chambers, whose extraordinary talents, skill and dedication across decades saved countless lives and earned him legend status across the Mallee. Mr Chambers was also a man of principle, putting his livelihood on the line in 2012 to blow the whistle on the failed privatisation experiment at Mildura base. It was a seminal moment. His courage inspired other local healthcare workers to activate, to risk their own careers and carry the cause for as long as it took for the stars to align and for the fight to be won. Two of those heroes were sitting at my table at this fundraiser: Stephen Parr and Danielle White. Congratulations to the dynamic team at Mildura Base Public Hospital and the Mildura Base Public Hospital foundation for an incredible effort. The base is back, baby!

MEDICAL RESEARCH

Mr McGUIRE (Broadmeadows) (15:37): The plan I am proposing is to establish AUKUS health. The aim is to deliver worldwide health breakthroughs in a time of global pandemic and accelerate opportunities from the Cancer Moonshot. Results can be driven by leveraging the relationship Australia, the United Kingdom and the United States of America have forged for defence and national security into health security. The AUKUS health strategy aims to harness collaboration founded through the Cancer Moonshot initiative to establish a brain gain between Australia, the UK and the US. My original proposal that Australia partner the White House and the Cancer Moonshot brought Joe Biden to Melbourne in 2016 for the opening of the billion-dollar jewel in Australia's medical research crown, our only comprehensive cancer centre, and internationalised this quest. Extending the Cancer Moonshot through AUKUS would be defining in the mission to crack the code of one of the world's biggest killers.

The next step is for Australia to partner President Biden in his plan to translate the US model designed for national security, leading to discoveries including the internet and GPS under a defence department agency, to focus on health. This collaboration would target breakthroughs to prevent, detect and treat

diseases including Alzheimer's, diabetes and cancer under the National Institutes of Health. President Biden's method is to adapt artificial intelligence and other technologies to supercharge breakthroughs predicted to outstrip half a century's advances in the next decade. The UK has €2 billion it wants to invest in science. My proposal is for Australia to drive this plan to deliver AUKUS health.

AUSTIN HEALTH OPPORTUNITY SHOP

Ms WARD (Eltham) (15:38): Since 1973 Diamond Creek's Austin Health community op shop has been an incredibly important and loved local resource, and it came about by chance. After watching a film in the early 1970s about the Austin Hospital seven women were so moved by what they saw that they decided to commit a significant part of their lives to fundraise for this much-loved hospital.

Fundraising started with packing show bags at the Whittlesea show, then went on to stalls at Northland, Chadstone, Greensborough and Diamond Creek. Reflecting their community's wants, locally made handknitted garments were offered for sale and outlets were visited to buy new goods to sell. These resourceful women raised funds in any way they could think of: raffles, baby shows, fashion parades and bingo nights. Over time these women's efforts became widely recognised. The first Austin Health op shop was opened in 1981, and volunteer numbers have increased tenfold. Today the shop is a thriving business, having raised over \$4 million for the Austin Hospital. One of these amazing women is Yvonne Dunt. Yvonne was the first secretary and served in a variety of roles, including 15 years as president and vice-president and another 25 years as secretary. For over 50 years Yvonne has been a continuous joy to customers and is still a friendly face to many people who wander into the shop. Thank you to the Austin Health op shop for the incredible work they do for our community and the ongoing service of their amazing volunteers.

ARTIE KENDALL

Ms WARD: Let me introduce the house to a wonderful three-year-old, Artie Kendall. Like a lot of toddlers, Artie loves trucks and watching the collection of rubbish bins. Most importantly he loves putting them away, and not just his bin or his nan's bin—he also now walks around his neighbourhood and kindly puts away his neighbours' bins. Artie is quite particular to ensure that bins are stacked in line with other household wheelie bins and continues to manoeuvre them until they are just right. (*Time expired*)

GOLF LINKS–WARRANTYTE–BAXTER–TOORADIN–GRANT ROADS ROUNDAABOUT, FRANKSTON

Mr EDBROOKE (Frankston) (15:40): Thank you, Deputy Speaker. I know you will be relieved to know that the roundabout on Golf Links Road—the package of roadworks that has happened on the Warrantyte Road, Baxter-Tooradin Road and Grant Road roundabout—is currently scheduled to open in a couple of days, and that is six to seven months ahead of when it was meant to be officially opened in March next year. The upgrade makes it easier and safer for people to get to the Peninsula Link, Somerville, Hastings and the Western Port Highway as well as lowering the risk of severe accidents with the safety barriers we have installed.

FRANKSTON STATION CAR PARK

Mr EDBROOKE: I know you will also be able to come and park your car sometime very soon at a 500-space car park with free car parking in Frankston as part of the state government's Car Parks for Commuters campaign and rollout. Our seven-level car park will be built very soon. I was on site this week just to have a look at some of the soil testing and the geotech work that is going on in relation to that project.

FRANKSTON SIGNAL BOX CENTENARY

Mr EDBROOKE: Last week we were very, very proud in Frankston to celebrate our Frankston signal box's centenary—a 100th birthday celebration. We celebrated in style at the signal box, then

we went to the CWA, where the Country Women's Association put on an awesome spread of scones, all sorts of biscuits and all sorts of delights that just put a smile on everyone's face basically. Thank you to everyone involved in the historical society and also those in the department.

AUBURN STATION PEDESTRIAN CROSSING

Mr KENNEDY (Hawthorn) (15:41): I would like to talk about an issue that both constituents and traders have raised with me consistently over the last year, the Auburn station pedestrian crossing. As some of you may know from your visits to my leafy electorate of Hawthorn, when you arrive at Auburn station you are presented with a picturesque shopping strip. It is home to industrious local businesses like Piquancy, a terrific Indian restaurant where my wife had her 60th, incidentally, or the Auburn Hotel, which is a very pleasant pub. However, it is sorely in need of a pedestrian crossing next to Auburn station. This would not only link the two railway trails but allow a high number of pedestrians to not make the onerous detour to the lights at Burwood Road, all whilst removing a significant safety risk. That is why in the most recent budget we committed \$250 000 to complete the bulk of the planning work for this project. Pedestrians should not have to run the gauntlet of the approximately 21 000 vehicles that pass through this crossing every day—another Andrews government triumph.

GOVERNMENT ACHIEVEMENTS

Mr TAYLOR (Bayswater) (15:43): Here are nine ways the state Labor government are putting money back in your pocket. Number one, the \$250 power saving bonus—every Victorian household that logs on to the Energy Compare website to find a cheaper power deal will get 250 bucks. Number two, we are making kinder free. From 2023 three- and four-year-old kinder will be free, meaning families will save up to 2500 bucks a year for every child. Number three, over 60 free TAFE courses—free TAFE offers more than 60 courses across growth industries, including early childhood education, health, construction and many, many more. Number four, free L and P licences. We are making learners and probationary licences free. New learner drivers will save up to \$51.40 on learners licences and online testing fees, while probationary drivers will save up to \$133.30 on probationary licences and online perception-testing fees. Number five, the safe driver reward is back. Full licence-holders who have not incurred demerit points or committed other road safety offences for three years prior to their licence renewal will receive a 25 per cent discount on their next renewal as part of the safe driver discount program. Number six, delivering the sick pay guarantee—eligible casual and contract workers in many industries can now register online and access up to five days of sick and carers pay per year. Seven, Solar Homes rebates—we are helping Victorians make the switch to solar, save on power bills and build a cleaner renewable future. We have capped council rates. We have introduced short-term rego renewal. There is so much more that the Andrews Labor government is doing to put money back in your pocket, and I am so proud to be getting that work done.

Bills

EARLY CHILDHOOD LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL 2022

Second reading

Debate resumed on motion of Ms HUTCHINS:

That this bill be now read a second time.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The member for Croydon.

Mr HODGETT (Croydon) (15:45): Thank you, Deputy Speaker. I do not think I have had the opportunity to date to congratulate you on your elevation to the Deputy Speaker role. I am still catching up with a number of people on your side that have had changes, so congratulations on that role, Deputy Speaker.

It is a pleasure to rise as the lead speaker on our side to speak on the Early Childhood Legislation Amendment Bill 2022. Perhaps at the outset I might just make a few comments about process and then signpost my intention to work through my contribution on the bill. A number of people in the house today and certainly at other times have talked about process and procedures in this place to ensure the smooth running of the Parliament. One of those processes is certainly the introduction of legislation and how as shadow ministers we need to quickly prepare in between sitting weeks to be able to go and consult stakeholders, have a bill briefing, form a view and put positions through party room processes to actually arrive when the bill is put on the government business program and brought on for debate. Part of making that process run smoothly of course when legislation is introduced is to organise a bill briefing, so I do want to just put on record at the outset my thanks to the minister and in particular her senior advisers and staff in early childhood, Enrico Burgio, Martel Menz and Daniel Benjamin, if I have got those names correct, who organised the bill briefing and were very helpful in terms of walking us through this piece of legislation. Indeed I think it was Enrico who followed up—there were a couple of queries we still had, and a few days later or a week or so later he was able to follow up and clarify those matters for us. I do thank the minister's staff and advisers, because it does help the process run smoothly of us getting to the stage where we can prepare between sitting weeks and get back to actually make a worthwhile contribution on the bill.

What I intend to do in my time available is to, as is the custom of the lead speaker, outline the purpose of the bill and the main provisions of the bill. It is important, although often a bit dry, to go through and put on record the purposes and main provisions of the bill, and I will take the opportunity to do that. I do want to discuss a few matters that were raised with me but that we got clarification on—and we were happy with that—and then conclude my contribution on the bill.

I should say at the very outset that we are not opposing this bill. The bill is about making several amendments to make child care safer for children and lift the quality of services. The amendments have the full support, as I understand, of the early childhood sector and stakeholders in Victoria and across Australia, endorsed through a review process, which I will come back to speaking briefly about. So as such a position of not opposed has been adopted by us on this side of the house in terms of our position on this bill.

By way of background, I should just touch on that before I move to the main purposes of the bill. The bill seeks to enhance the regulatory system for early childhood education in Victoria and nationally. The bill proposes various amendments to several acts, and I will outline those in my contribution. This follows the 2019 national quality framework review aimed at ensuring that the NQF continues to meet its objectives and considering the ongoing effectiveness and sustainability of the NQF considering the continuing evolution of the education and care sector. A meeting of the education ministers on 6 May 2022 endorsed the final 2019 NQF review, and that is how we arrive where we are today, if you like, at this bill, making those changes. Whilst there is a long history here, and where Victoria sits in taking the lead on this, I am sure there are many on both sides who will in their contributions talk a bit about that process and where we sit there.

But if I move to the main provisions of the bill, the Early Childhood Legislation Amendment Bill 2022 amends the Education and Care Services National Law Act 2010 to implement the recommendations arising from that 2019 national quality framework review and some additional minor policy decisions by the ministerial council, comprised of the ministers with responsibility for matters under the Education and Care Services National Law, at the education ministers meeting. It also amends:

- the **Children's Services Act 1996** to maintain alignment with the Education and Care Services National Law;
- the **Education and Care Services National Law Act 2010**, the **Children's Services Act 1996** and the **Child Wellbeing and Safety (Child Safe Standards Compliance and Enforcement) Amendment Act 2021** to provide that the Secretary to the Department of Education and Training, as the Regulatory Authority for Victoria under the **Education and Care Services National Law and the Children's**

Services Act 1996, is the integrated sector regulator for the Child Safe Standards for the early childhood sector in Victoria;

- the **Education and Care Services National Law Act 2010** to remove the redundant requirement to table the annual report of the National Authority in each house of the Victorian Parliament.

I will come back to that. That was a matter that a couple of my colleagues on this side of the house raised. I did seek clarification at the bill briefing, and I was satisfied with the response given by those present for why that change is required and why it removes that redundant requirement to table the annual report of the national authority in each house of the Victorian Parliament. Moving then to the main purposes of the bill:

The Bill's main purposes include to amend the **Education and Care Services National Law Act 2010**, the **Children's Services Act 1996** and the **Child Wellbeing and Safety (Child Safe Standards Compliance and Enforcement) Amendment Act 2021** to provide for matters relating to the Regulatory Authority as the integrated sector regulator for education and care services and children's services in Victoria.

I wish to put these specific changes and/or amendments on record, because I think it is important, particularly as the lead speaker, that we do have that. I know the minister's second-reading speech touches on a lot of these things and the bill is obviously available, but it is important to outline what these changes are, so I wanted to put those specific changes or amendments on record in the time that I have got available.

The main provisions of the bill also include to amend the Education and Care Services National Law set out in the schedule to the Education and Care Services National Law Act 2010 by the following:

- to expand the meaning of a person with management or control of an education and care service; and
- to clarify that a Regulatory Authority may administer tests or questions for the purposes of assessing a person's fitness and propriety; and
- to provide for suspension or cancellation of provider approval in certain circumstances where the provider approval has been cancelled or refused under the A New Tax System (Family Assistance) (Administration) Act 1999 of the Commonwealth; and
- to remove service waivers and temporary waivers in relation to compliance with an element of the National Quality Standard; and
- to change the notification process for the transfer of a service approval ...

There are a couple of others that I will continue to advance:

- to clarify the requirements for display of information in relation to family day care services; and
- to make changes to the condition requiring employment or engagement of a minimum number of family day care co-ordinators; and
- to extend the duration of the highest rating for an education and care service; and
- to extend the requirement under the Education and Care Services National Law for child protection training to family day care co-ordinators; and
- to increase the maximum penalties for various offences against the Education and Care Services National Law ...

So there is quite a mouthful there in terms of main purposes, but as I said, it is important to put those specific amendments on record as we are making contributions to the bill and talking about why they may be required as part of this bill.

The main purposes of the bill also include to amend the Children's Services Act 1996, as I mentioned:

- to expand the meaning of a person with management or control of a children's service; and
- to clarify that a Regulatory Authority may administer tests or questions for the purposes of assessing a person's fitness and propriety; and
- to provide for suspension or cancellation of a provider approval in certain circumstances where the provider approval has been cancelled or refused under the A New Tax System (Family Assistance) (Administration) Act 1999 of the Commonwealth; and
- to change the notification process for transfer of a service approval.

Another main purpose of the bill is to amend the Education and Care Services National Law Act 2010 to remove the redundant requirement to table the annual report of the national authority in both houses of the Victorian Parliament, which I have mentioned. Again, I will come back to that in a moment. Finally, the other main purpose of the bill is to amend the Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005 in relation to the provision of maternal and child health (MCH) nursing services and to provide further maternal and child health nurse regulation-making powers.

I have been through the background. But again, just to put it on record, the bill seeks to enhance that regulatory system for early childhood education in Victoria and nationally. The bill proposes various amendments to several acts, which I have outlined in detail. This follows the 2019 national quality framework review, which was aimed at ensuring that the national quality framework continues to meet its objectives, considering the ongoing effectiveness and sustainability of the national quality framework and considering the continuing evolution of the education and care sector, which we know continues to face challenges and changes and does need that regular review. Finally, as I have mentioned, a meeting of the education ministers in May this year—on 6 May 2022—endorsed that final 2019 national quality framework review.

In layman's terms, for want of better words—rather than the technical side of all those amendments—the bill is about making a number of amendments to make child care safer for children and lift the quality of services. I think we would all agree with that. No-one would be against making child care safer for children and lifting the quality of services. Certainly we are in full support of that. The bill requires all family day care coordinators to complete child protection training prior to commencing employment. We think that is an important change, and we wholeheartedly support that. The bill provides for greater access to information about family day care providers by regulatory authorities and the department. Again, at the bill briefing, quite some time was spent on how that works—what access to information will be forthcoming and how that information will be used to improve services and to make child care safer. The regulator will also be able to assess more rigorously the fitness and propriety of service providers across the sector, and again we have no argument there. We all want that to be tested and to have the best possible people in the childcare industry.

The bill also makes some minor amendments relating to maternal and child health nursing services to require providers of MCH nursing services to employ or engage nurses only if they have a prescribed prerequisite. As I mentioned, there were a couple of questions from some of my colleagues around that. I am thankful to Enrico for providing clarification on that. We were quite satisfied with the answer that was given and need no further discussion or debate around that item.

There were a couple of areas that were raised with me that we did seek clarification about at the very thorough bill briefing. Clarification was sought about amending the national law act to remove the redundant requirement to table the annual report of the national authority in each house of the Victorian Parliament. Again, when someone reads that, immediately the alarm bells go off: what does that mean, why is it changing and how does that impact? The response stated that the annual report of the national authority is tabled at the national level in the federal Parliament, which removes the need for it to be repeated in the Victorian Parliament. So the information is still there—it is still accessible and still available—so there is no need for great concern around that. It is a straightforward and sensible change.

Many of the amendments will be made through regulations; however, several of the amendments need to be made through the act. We have gone through those changes and the amendments that need to be made through the act. The rest of course are through regulations. Yes, when you are in opposition often there are concerns raised or red flags go up when governments can exercise power through regulations, free from the scrutiny of the Parliament, but again it is par for the course for the government of the day to be able to make those changes through regulations, so we will continue to monitor and just see what sort of changes are made through regulations and of course raise any concerns with the minister or through the department should the need arise.

Finally, the national quality review changes will commence from July this year. I will not spend a lot of time—although time is on my side today—talking about Victoria's role in this, but the changes will commence from July next year, and as such these amendments and the bill must pass this year. Furthermore, the child safe standards commence from 1 January next year and therefore the minister is time bound to get these amendments through the Parliament this term. So we are not opposing the bill. I would see that it would pass this house this week, allowing the Council, those in the other place, to debate it. Of course the minister is in the other house, so they would be able to debate it and it would meet the requirements of passing the Parliament and meeting all those date requirements. As I said, when it comes to improving services and the quality of services and childcare safety, it should have the support to be able to get through the house with minimal disruption over the next couple of weeks.

I am just looking to see if there are any other points I wish to raise in the time allotted to me. Again, by way of process, I do enjoy when we get a piece of legislation in this house and we go out and consult with a wide range of people, stakeholder groups. There are many in a lot of portfolios, and certainly the stakeholders in early childhood are many and varied. We did engage through email, phone and whatever means we could, inviting stakeholders to make comment on the bill. We received no opposition to the bill from any of the stakeholders, so again that helped us form a view on this. Certainly if we had any matters that were raised by stakeholders we would have put them forward at the bill briefing, which that process allows for.

As I said at the outset, we are not opposing the bill. The bill is about making several amendments to make child care safer for children and lifting the quality of service. The amendments have the support of the early childhood sector and stakeholders in Victoria and indeed across Australia, endorsed through the review process, so that is why I put our not-opposed position. I will leave it there. I am sure there are many people on both sides that would like to make a contribution on this bill. Of course we all have early childhood education centres and understand the importance of early childhood development in our electorates, so I am sure many will make contributions on that. I will leave my contribution there.

Mr RICHARDSON (Mordialloc) (16:03): It is a real pleasure to rise and speak on the Early Childhood Legislation Amendment Bill 2022 at a time of unprecedented development and investment in early childhood education, and it is fitting that this bill comes at around about the 10-year mark of the implementation of the national quality framework, a landmark Gillard federal Labor government reform, led by Minister Ellis at the time, that looked to standardise and improve the quality of standards across Australia for all of our youngest Australians as they embark on the most formative part of their education journey, early childhood education. That reform piece has been extraordinary for millions of young people who have benefited during that time in their early childhood education and experience. It has changed ratios, it has changed outcomes, it has lifted standards and it has made sure that our youngest Australians get the very best outcomes, because we know that an early childhood education is so critical and fundamental to the development of our young people.

We know of the amazing magic that happens in brain development in the first 1000 days of a child's life. I have experienced that twice. I am embarking on it for the second time, with the little one now 18 months old. We know how important our early childhood education workforce is and the work that they do to support young people in our community. They are experiencing now a time of great change and revolution from a building and investment standpoint. They know that this government backs their sector and is working with them in every element of the work that they do. When we think about the Building Blocks investment that has been made to roll out universal three-year-old kinder, we are in the 2022 year of that rollout—that is, 5 hours of universal three-year-old kinder. That is an extraordinary outcome.

We know the landmark reports into early childhood development and brain development of our young people did not differentiate between three- and four-year-old kinder, but it was the Andrews Labor government that led the way and led the nation in saying that it would deliver 15 hours of three-year-old kinder. It is amazing to see the excitement from our early childhood providers across the

Mordialloc electorate and indeed all parts of Victoria. I have had the chance, as Parliamentary Secretary for Schools, to jump into the early childhood education space on a few occasions, opening up buildings and facilities and meeting with educators, our teachers and communities, who have greatly benefited from this investment.

So universal three-year-old kinder is being rolled out. We then see free kinder and the great reforms this is bringing and the cost-of-living savings. \$2500 per child per setting is an extraordinary contribution to help families, but it also places a significant value on encouraging all of our kids to access kinder or early childhood education, regardless of the settings. It is a really important investment and cost-of-living support measure as well. But then there is the big one—the absolute big one—30 hours of pre-prep early education, the equivalent of four-year-old kinder, is one of the proudest things that we can all share in this Parliament. It is one of the biggest reforms that we will see. By 2032 this will be rolled out across our state so kids and their families can be sure in the future that they are getting the very best education right here in Victoria.

We are the Education State all the way through, whether it is in early childhood education, in primary and secondary, in specialist and special developmental school settings or in TAFE and our tertiary settings. We have the very best institutions, the best educators and the most dedicated workforce in the nation. We need about 10 000 early childhood educators over the coming years. I know that there has been a lot of focus on choosing nursing as a profession in recent announcements, but we really want more teachers, more early childhood teachers, choosing—what a contribution to make!—to get involved in this sector and to support the next generation of Victorians coming through.

One of the very first briefings that I had as Parliamentary Secretary for Schools was about the power and impact of early childhood education. You see, you can measure whether an individual has had that really formative education early on and track it right through their life and the outcomes that they have in the future, such is the power of that 1000 days of brain development. We have a huge obligation to make sure that we set all of our kids up, regardless of circumstances, regardless of their postcode or their setting, so that they get the very best opportunities. When you know how powerful and how impactful it is on outcomes for young Victorians, you wonder why it was not done ages ago. But now we have got that investment, we have got a rollout journey, and the Andrews Labor government is delivering an absolute building, investment and workforce revolution in the early childhood setting.

This bill really adds another element to that. It is about investment, but it is also about quality and it is about safety for our kids. From that Council of Australian Governments process that I talked about that was implemented a decade ago by the Gillard federal Labor government, some of the work that was done under that review has led to some of the changes that we see in this Early Childhood Legislation Amendment Bill today. Some of them were covered off by the Shadow Minister for Education, who went through them. I acknowledge the bipartisan way in which that engagement has occurred as well. The work he has done in engaging the sector and community is really important as well. There have been cross-party deliberations between a range of different ministers through the Council of Australian Governments to get to this point and then we will see those reforms and changes implemented in each model jurisdiction as well.

Turning to some of those changes that we see, the two key reasons that this bill has come before the Parliament are to implement the outcomes of the five-yearly review of the national quality framework and to enable child safe standards to be enforced in early childhood services by the existing regulator, the Secretary of the Department of Education and Training, to provide a clear departmental oversight, an important oversight. It builds on that ongoing work to make sure that we are at the forefront of reform and delivery of the national quality framework amendments. That will strengthen the safety of our kids in early childhood services and improve oversight and compliance tools for the regulatory authority. What could be more important than making sure, with the absolute revolution that we are seeing in building, in early childhood outcomes, in investment that has been made and in the huge expansion in staff and young Victorians being able to access those facilities and settings across

Victoria now with 5 hours of universal three-year-old kinder, that the safety and compliance is absolute and that parents, guardians, carers and grandparents have the greatest assurance that that safety and support has been implemented.

The bill will also support early childhood services to comply with child safe standards so that protecting children from harm and abuse is embedded in the everyday practice of leaders, staff and volunteers. There are so many different elements and different settings that we see in early childhood education, from childcare settings—highly regulated—through to our volunteer kinder associations that might be supported by local government or volunteer boards. There is a real spectrum. It is a complex setting and industry that underpins the learning and outcomes of the youngest Victorians in our community. We need to make sure that there is always that high level of compliance, support and care and make sure that every single early childhood setting has the tools available to make sure that they are at the highest level of compliance and engagement and make sure that they are taking all the preventative steps—auditing that and making sure that our kids are always safe.

I also love the maternal and child health service reforms that are part of this bill. Maternal and child health workers are some of the greatest Victorians ever. They do an extraordinary job in our community supporting young families on their journey and in our council settings and our state settings. The maternal and child health amendments in this bill safeguard the prerequisites to become part of the maternal and child health workforce and are consistent with this Andrews Labor government's commitment to deliver a high-quality maternal and child health service into the future.

We have experienced that as a family. One in six women will go through postnatal depression. I have talked in this setting about Lauren's journey—my partner, Lauren—and the importance of maternal and child health workers in supporting you on your journey into the future. I just want to give them a big shout-out for the work that they do, whether it is coming to your home and giving you that comfort and care and support and saying that you are, hopefully, on the right journey or letting you know if your little one is up and about and tracking okay. They do an incredible job. Where would we be without the maternal and child health sector? We need to invest more in it, and these safeguards for the prerequisites are truly amazing.

This is another example of the Andrews Labor government delivering in early childhood education and putting the youngest Victorians at the forefront of everything we do—massive investment in the workforce, massive investment in facilities and making sure that universal kinder rolled out into the future changes the lives and outcomes of young Victorians.

Ms RYAN (Euroa) (16:13): Acting Speaker McCurdy, it is lovely to see you in the chair. I am very pleased to rise today to talk on this important piece of legislation. This bill implements recommendations from the 2019 review of the national quality framework, as others have touched on, which have of course been agreed to by states and territories through the ministerial council (MinCo) and the COAG process. That framework aims to provide a national approach to the regulation of care and of education services across Australia. The 2019 review was designed as a bit of a check-in, I suppose, to make sure that that framework was still fit for purpose and operating within the objectives of national law. Those objectives include ensuring the safety of and improving the educational and development outcomes of children enrolled in education and care services. Importantly, the national laws also aim to improve access to information about the quality of education and care services whilst also reducing the regulatory and administrative burden on services, and we see some of that in the legislation before the house at the moment.

I want to specifically touch on some of the changes that this legislation makes around family day care and the rating systems before making some more general comments about the provision of child care. The bill seeks to clarify the requirements for the display of information in relation to family day care services. I understand from reading some of the documentation around the review that that will basically mean that a family day care educator must display an assessment of their venue or residence and that an approved assessor must undertake that assessment, and that is designed to provide a level

of information to families about the risks that might exist within that physical environment. Family day cares will have to put on public display that diagram so that families are more informed. I think it is a good thing to make sure that families are informed. It also extends the requirement for child protection training to family day care coordinators. Again, I think that is a good thing.

I just want, I suppose, to reflect on how important family day care is, particularly in the provision of care in regional Victoria, where often long day care services do not exist or are not available. I know that everyone's experience of family day care is different, and I have spoken to friends who are sometimes a bit iffy about family day care. But on a very personal note, my own little one is in family day care in Seymour, and I cannot speak highly enough of the relationship our family has had with Sonya Drummond, who runs our service. I do not usually indulge in speaking about myself when it comes to debating bills, but I hope that my electorate will forgive me on this one occasion. I have always been very aware that my story is but one of 49 000 that I represent in this place, but I did want to mention Yiayia, because she has been an absolute lifesaver for our family on so many occasions—and I will try not to get emotional. The care that she provides for Sunday sometimes feels like an absolute lifeline for our family. It has given Sunday real stability, and I cannot thank her enough for what she has done for our family. She is so much more than the carer of our child. Sonya has also been my parenting mentor in lots of ways. With Sunday being my first child, she has been a real source of advice for us. Over the last couple of years I have stood in her living room, and at times I have laughed and at times I have cried. She knows more about our family and the challenges that we face—the ups and downs and the good times and the bad—than many people. I think that is the relationship that many people can have with a good—we call them 'childcare providers' and we call them 'childcare services', but often they play a much bigger role in people's lives and in families' lives. It is important that this does reflect why it is important to ensure that the regulation is right, but sometimes when we stand in this place as legislators and as regulators we cannot always capture those relationships that exist between families and between the people who those families entrust to look after the most important little people in their lives. I do wish everyone had a Yiayia, and I would like to thank her so very sincerely for what she has done for our family.

A further change in this bill is to extend the duration of the highest rating, the 'excellent' rating, for an education and care service. I do want to just reflect on that, because I can understand why the change has been recommended by MinCo, extending it from three years to five years. But I do, I suppose, want to flag that I think that this should be closely monitored. I get why you would seek to reduce the administrative burden, but at the same time a lot can change in five years—workforces change, management can change. I know in the past I have relied on those national quality standard ratings to assess a childcare service, and we really need to keep close watch on that to make sure that services that do get rated 'excellent' do not then fall off and families are not making decisions based on that.

I wanted to mention the Mitchell Institute report. Many in the chamber would no doubt have studied the work that they have done around the availability of child care in Australia. That study told us what we already know in regional Victoria. Child care for many families is incredibly difficult, and many are living in what is deemed a childcare desert. There are many smaller communities in my electorate—communities like Murchison, Rushworth, Tooborac and Redesdale—that have no child care at all, and many of our larger towns do not have enough services or places to cater for the number of children who live there. So a family in Kilmore who wants to access child care will have between two and six children vying for that place, depending on where they live. It is a very similar story in Broadford, and that has a domino effect on the rest of the community. So, for example, in Murchison, because there is no child care, parents have to take their children to Shepparton, and that means their own employment options are limited. But it also means that their children then seek to go to school in Shepparton and they seek to play sport in Shepparton, and that strips a community like Murchison of the young people who might otherwise engage in their own community.

I think no discussion is complete about the availability of child care in regional Victoria without considering how that data from the Australian Early Development Census and the availability of child

care impacts on the vulnerability of children and their emotional, physical and social wellbeing. That picture is quite stark when you look at the results from the AEDC. Communities in regional Victoria are consistently among the most disadvantaged in the state. Benalla, for example, has a high percentage of children vulnerable on all indicators when compared with the state average. Seymour has double the state average of kids deemed developmentally vulnerable in social, emotional and language measures, and the further you get from Melbourne, the worse the results.

During my time I have advocated for more funding for Tomorrow Today, which is an amazing philanthropic organisation in Benalla. I have been very proud to work with the organisation to secure an additional three years of funding, but the organisation will again be scrambling for funds come 2023. I want to see a commitment to continued support for them. Their goal is to ensure that all kids in Benalla are ready to learn when they attend school—and the work they do is amazing. I think with my time here due to come to an end I would like to encourage both sides to seriously look at that program and that early intervention model to help close the gap between rural and regional students.

In concluding I just want to make a few comments about the availability of child care in this place, and I hope the house will indulge me. I know I am somewhat straying from the subject of the bill, but I do think it is vitally important that the Victorian Parliament seeks to modernise itself and seeks to follow the lead of the commonwealth Parliament in providing child care here on site. I know I am not the first person in this place who has faced such challenges—and my good friend the member for Lowan is here; she has similarly. But of course the member for Bendigo East in this place also has children and is a woman living in regional Victoria. I would like to think that the Parliament would do more to recognise the unique challenges of this workplace for others who are seeking to represent their communities. I think more can be done for MPs with little kids who have to leave their home in order to travel to Parliament. I have to say I have been surprised by the institutional resistance that I have felt when I have raised these issues. Deputy Speaker, I would, with the consent of the minister at the table, request a brief extension of time.

Leave granted.

Ms RYAN: Thank you to the Leader of the House. I do not deny the fact that we as MPs are well remunerated, but there are few people who can hold a full-time place in child care in their own community and also hold one in Melbourne for the 14 weeks of the year that Parliament sits. At various times it has been suggested to me that I get a nanny. Even if that were possible, it is very difficult to find someone who is willing to look after your child in your own community and also travel to Melbourne away from their home and family whilst Parliament is sitting or indeed to find someone who is willing to do it in Melbourne on an ad hoc basis. I have also been told that there is a challenge because there is not enough demand from within the Parliament for such a service, but I do not think that is a legitimate reason when there are indeed public servants in this precinct who I think would also seek to access such a service. That service does not need to be based here on site; it could be based within the precinct.

There have been sitting weeks where I have commuted 2 hours home, when Parliament has adjourned at 7.30 at night, to be able to see my child, despite the fact that she is well and truly asleep and in bed by then, and then I have left at 5.00 am to get back to be here ready to work and to do my job. My husband has done the reverse commute—and he will do that again this sitting week—where in order for us to be together as a family he has left Melbourne at 6.00 am on a sitting day, dropped our child in Seymour, gone home, worked the day, left, picked her up in Seymour and come back to Melbourne so that I could see her in the evening. That is pretty rough on a little kid, having to constantly shift between places. But my point is that it is not sustainable, and it should not be necessary in a modern workplace.

If the Parliament generally wants to reflect the diversity of the Victorian community, it needs to recognise this challenge and actually provide more support and more access to child care for MPs during sitting weeks. I have been loath to raise this for myself because I do not like raising it for me,

but I am conscious that there are now women who are seeking to come into this place, and it is important for them that it changes. We have women on the government side who are contesting regional seats like Lara and Ripon and women like my successor—hopefully, if she is given the honour of being elected—who have young children. For those women—and it is not just women, it is men as well—and those MPs with young children, it needs to change if we want this place to be sustainable. With those comments, and in thanking the Leader of the House and the Minister for Multicultural Affairs at the table for their indulgence and their kindness in allowing me to go well past my time, I would like to commend the bill to the house.

Ms ADDISON (Wendouree) (16:26): I too would like to speak in support of the Early Childhood Legislation Amendment Bill 2022, which introduces stronger regulations for early childhood services and safeguards for the quality of maternal and child health services. I will be focusing on our stronger regulations for early childhood services during this debate and the importance of this bill passing in 2022.

I thank the member for Mordialloc for his contribution to this debate and for the work that he does as Parliamentary Secretary for Schools and Parliamentary Secretary for Mental Health and Social Inclusion. Like me, the member for Mordialloc is a proud parent of two daughters and wants the best opportunities for his children and every child in Victoria. I would really like to thank the member for Euroa for sharing her experiences with us. Thank you. You will be missed in this place, and that was just beautiful, that advocacy at the end, so well done to you. It was a really, really great contribution. You will be missed—I am sorry, Chair, not to go through you—and I wish you and all the family all the best for the next chapter.

This bill is about ensuring that Victoria continues to be a nation leader in providing children with quality early childhood education that really does set them up for life. I wish to thank the Minister for Early Childhood and Pre-Prep in the other place for her commitment and advocacy for the early childhood portfolio. I wish to particularly thank Harriet Leadbeater and the advisers in the minister's office as well as the department for the work that they have done to bring this bill to the house. Your work is appreciated, so thank you so much. I wish to commend the minister on the landmark work she is doing in leading our transformative early education program.

Anyone who has sent kids to kinder knows that kinders are not just places where our children learn, where they create and where they innovate and play; they are a vital part of our community. Kinders provide important bonds and create social cohesion and inclusion for parents, children and carers. I know that some of my best friends are mums I met through the kinder drop-offs and the kinder pick-ups and when we cut so much fruit together as volunteers at our local kinder. Importantly, I always love when I am out and about in Ballarat catching up with my daughters' kinder teachers, including Heather, Cate and Mary. They are wonderful early educators who inspired my girls to be curious, to be compassionate and to be caring.

The role our kinders play in our state is crucial, and that is why it is so important that we invest in the educators, the programs and the infrastructure to support them. Since 2015 kindergarten services in my LGA, the City of Ballarat, have received more than \$10 million in state government funding to support 40 infrastructure projects and 92 IT or inclusive education equipment projects—really, really significant investments by this government in early education. Our government is proudly embarking on the largest early childhood investments in this state's history to give every Victorian child the very best start in life. Our Best Start, Best Life program is a game changer for families and for the whole community. The changes that we are introducing to early childhood education will be transformative in both the short and long term for our children, their parents and our state.

The Early Childhood Legislation Amendment Bill 2022 before the house will ensure that we deliver quality, safe and accessible early childhood education for every Victorian child, and it is another example of our commitment to building on our track record. By amending the laws that regulate the quality and safety of early childhood services, this bill will ensure that oversight and compliance tools for early childhood regulators are as robust as possible. This is a bill that I am really proud of, because

every parent—I certainly did and my husband certainly did—expects their children to be safe at kinder, to be provided with high-quality care and education and to be looked after. You do not want to be worrying while you are at work or while you are raising your other children about whether your kids are safe at kinder. You want to know that robust checks and balances are there.

It is very important that we pass this bill this year because Victoria needs to be able to ensure that this is passed in 2022 to enable the implementation of the outcomes of the five-year national quality framework review in mid-2023. All state and territory education ministers around the country have agreed that the regulatory changes recommended by the national quality framework review should commence from 1 July 2023, and this is also the strong expectation of the stakeholders in the childhood sector. The national quality framework operates as an applied national law scheme. The national law is enacted by Victoria as the host jurisdiction and is applied in other jurisdictions as their own law or, in Western Australia, through corresponding legislation. The passage of this bill this year is also critical to ensure the integrated sector regulator provisions for the child safe standards can commence on 1 January 2023 along with the rest of the new enforcement regimes for the child safe standards. I think everyone in this house is in agreement that making sure children are safe is our number one priority and so important, and passing this legislation is important. Significantly, this bill further complements the Andrews Labor government's life-changing reforms to early childhood, giving our youngest Victorians the very best start and the best opportunities in life.

Early education is an issue that is important to many families across my electorate of Wendouree, and the rollout of the Andrews Labor government's landmark reforms is most welcome. Childcare fees are crippling family budgets and holding parents back—mainly mums—from returning to work. I know from firsthand experience how tough childcare fees are on hardworking families. When I was teaching part-time—I was a secondary teacher—we had a school timetable across a fortnight, so there would be some weeks that I did not teach on a Tuesday at all but the following Tuesday I taught all day, and I had to have the kids in child care on both Tuesdays. At one stage I did the maths: I was earning \$1.71 an hour after I had paid childcare fees. So we need to change this, and we are changing this, because we know the profound impact that it is having. That is why we are making kinder free for three- and four-year-olds, saving families across Ballarat and the whole of Victoria up to \$2500 per year. In doing so we are delivering relief to household budgets. I know that when you are juggling on part-time wages with these high fees it is really, really challenging.

On Saturday I had the wonderful opportunity of having a street stall at the Ballarat Baby & Children's Market at the Doug Dean Stadium in Delacombe and had so many terrific conversations with lots of new parents and grandparents about our exciting investments in early education. It was wonderful to speak to so many parents with newborns and share the excellent news that from 2025 we will transition from four-year-old kinder to pre-prep with 30 hours of learning, creating a high-quality, universal program to give four-year-old kids the opportunity to learn through play. I strongly believe that by investing in early childhood education we are ensuring the next generation will have a bright future and our state will benefit significantly. Whether it is through the building of new bricks and mortar infrastructure or free TAFE courses to train early childhood educators, the Andrews Labor government is supporting our littlest learners to get the best start in life. We are also creating more three-year-old and four-year-old kindergarten places across Victoria, including in my electorate of Ballarat. In June this year I was delighted to announce \$2.25 million for the Building Blocks capacity-building stream grant for the City of Ballarat to create three kinder rooms at a brand new Alfredton Ballymanus community hub. It is a part of my electorate that I know very well, having grown up just less than a kilometre away, and it is only a short distance from where I attended Alfredton kinder with Mrs Lucas and Miss Helen. I have such happy memories of my kinder days being filled with interactive play, singing, painting, games and so many stories.

The Building Blocks capacity-building stream grant for the Alfredton Ballymanus kinder was one of six grants announced across Victoria, sharing in almost \$10 million. The investment will allow more kids to attend kinder and ensure that they get the best start possible. What we are going to do in

Ballymanus is construct three new kinder rooms, each with the capacity for 33 children undertaking three- or four-year-old kinder programs. But what is really important is that means 198 children will be able to access three- or four-year-old kindergarten programs during the week. This is so significant and is wonderful news for the families with babies and young children living in Alfredton and the adjacent growth suburbs of Winter Valley and Lucas. I know this because the young families are telling me how pleased they are that they will be able to walk their little ones to kinder and their children will go on to make friends with kids in the neighbourhood. This is a really, really important part of our program. I am so proud to be a part of this government, and I commend the Early Childhood Legislation Amendment Bill 2022 to the house.

Mr SOUTHWICK (Caulfield) (16:36): It is a pleasure to rise and make some comments on the Early Childhood Legislation Amendment Bill 2022. As our lead speaker, the member for Croydon, has already alluded to, we are not opposing this bill. There are some very important things in this bill that we absolutely, as many speakers have said today, need to be supporting. Quality child care is something that we should all be aspiring to—safe child care and doing the very best for our kids, our families and women. That is a lot of what this bill is all about. Child care is all about giving families choice—giving women the choice to return back to work and giving children the best start in life. We have heard some fantastic contributions today. I want to particularly thank the member for Euroa for the heartfelt comments that she made to the chamber, in amongst it talking about providing child care in the workplace, including this workplace. We should be doing whatever we can to provide accessible, affordable child care in the workplace, and I certainly support the comments that she made today in the chamber.

One of the things that we have spoken a lot about is cost, which is a huge thing. I know that both the government and the opposition have come out and have said they will provide free child care for three- and four-year-olds, which is great—really, really good. The other end of the spectrum is accessibility. There is no question, whatever report you look at, whatever report you read, that there is a real issue in terms of a shortage of child care. As the member for Euroa mentioned in her contribution, the Mitchell report, which was done in March 2022 by Victoria University, titled *Deserts and Oases: How Accessible is Childcare in Australia?*, talked about how more than 9 million Australians live in areas where there are insufficient childcare places for families, according to the most comprehensive analysis ever undertaken into child care availability in Australia. The report found that 28 per cent of metropolitan and 52 per cent of regional Australians live in areas considered childcare deserts, with no availability of child care whatsoever, and 1 million Australians have no access whatsoever to child care. So accessibility is key, and the further out you go, the harder it becomes. The flip side of that in areas like mine is where there is a real need for child care there have been a lot of private providers popping up, which is great, but then the cost in many instances becomes quite prohibitive as well, so it is getting that balance right.

One of the things that the member for Brighton and I worked very well together on was supporting a number of not-for-profit childcare centres in the City of Port Phillip that were earmarked for closure by the City of Port Phillip. There was a huge uprising by the local community, and I commend those members that stood up to fight to have those childcare centres saved. There were 120 children at these three childcare centres: Eildon Road Childcare and Kindergarten, Elwood Children's Centre and the Avenue Children's Centre and Kindergarten. These three centres were ones which we fought with the parents to save. Over 3000 people signed the petition to have them saved, and I am pleased to say that the council have halted the closure of those for the moment and have made a commitment of \$5 million to have those childcare centres upgraded so they can be fit for purpose and saved going forward.

This is an important example, an area like Port Phillip and Glen Eira, where it is implied that there is demand. There are a lot of private centres available, so you would think there would not be a problem. There is a problem in terms of the waiting list in these areas, both in the for-profit and the not-for-profit, and we just cannot afford to have more closures. That is why it was one of the campaigns that I was very pleased to join the member for Brighton on, to ensure that those childcare centres were saved.

Interestingly, when I was looking at this today I came across something which I had read some years ago and just refreshed my memory on Albert Einstein as a child. Few people would ever have anticipated where Albert Einstein ended up, particularly with his language and developmental issues as a child. His sister once confessed that Einstein had such difficulty with language that those around him feared that he would never, ever learn. When he was not well, at the age of five and bedridden, his father gave him a compass; that was kind of considered the move into science. His mother, who was a talented pianist, gave him a violin, which obviously also sparked that learning as well. It is interesting the importance of that early learning and what that does and how that sets you up. Not everybody is going to be an Einstein but everybody should have that ability to learn and have the best service that we possibly can provide. It is a great reminder of just how important the provision of early child care, early learning and education is.

It has always been for me the leveller—no matter who you are, no matter where you come from—having the availability of an education as early as possible and being able to give people a level playing field. I know this is not necessarily directly related to child care, but one of the things that certainly got me involved in politics and community was working with the Ardoch Youth Foundation. A young girl was coming to school out of a Brotherhood bin at the age of about 12. She knew then the only way to change her life was to actually get an education. She had everything going against her—her family, her financial inability and no support—and it was education that changed her life.

So I say child care at the very earliest level is just so important: accessibility, availability, cost—the best possible child care, which this bill talks about—safety and quality. We have seen time and time again, unfortunately, situations where we have not necessarily had the best care and we have had people in the past that have not necessarily been trained the way they could have been. I know absolutely when someone has dropped their kid off at a childcare centre they are off doing their thing, but they want peace of mind to know that their child is going to be safe. That has got to be absolutely paramount. As I say, accessibility, availability and the best possible care—that is what we are striving towards, what we all should be striving towards, and that is why I think it is really important to do whatever we can in this chamber to support changes to ensure quality is not compromised in any possible way and that we are giving our children the best start in life.

Mr McGHIE (Melton) (16:45): I rise today to contribute on the Early Childhood Legislation Amendment Bill 2022. Before I commence my contribution I would just like to acknowledge the contribution of the member for Euroa and the important points that she raised with the extension of time that she had, in particular in regard to this place and the childcare arrangements—or lack of—here for parents, and younger parents at that, to try and encourage people to come into politics. I really do acknowledge that contribution by her.

What a fantastic policy and legislation the Minister for Early Childhood and Pre-Prep and this Andrews Labor government have delivered for Victoria. The delivery of services and the exceptional paradigm shifts this government has made to prepare our children for school and lifelong education are transformational. This policy has been a game changer for families in my electorate of Melton, and just last week I was delighted to have the Premier himself come out to the Melton electorate to visit Bridge Road Children's and Community Centre. This centre is a multipurpose facility with a large space for community and commercial activities. The venue also has a range of early childhood services, such as a kindergarten, maternal and child health and occasional care, and the excellent work of the Kirrip Aboriginal Corporation in delivering their Aboriginal playgroup also takes advantage of this excellent facility now as the group has expanded. The Treasurer and I heard about this amazing work when we visited Kirrip Aboriginal Corporation only a couple of weeks ago. The delivery of early childhood education in Melton by this Andrews Labor government has been well received. It was just great for the many families to meet with the Premier last Wednesday and to hear exactly how this government is delivering for them, for the Melton electorate and for all Victorians. Bridge Road Children's and Community Centre is another example of this investment as the community of Strathulloh and Cobblebank enjoy the benefits of this government's investment in education. I want

to give a shout-out to the supervisor at Bridge Road community centre and child care, Debbie Muir, and her wonderful team of educators for their dedication to our young ones starting out in their education journey. On that particular day last week when we were out there, they were amazing with the young kids within the centre.

The early learning education for these families may begin here, but they will soon transition to the new Strathulloh Primary School, which we opened earlier this year. Later they will be able to attend the new secondary school in Cobblebank, which the Treasurer allocated funding to purchase the land for in this year's state budget. Later on they may be able to choose to study in tertiary education centres that will likely be co-located with the building of the new Melton hospital—possibly even for free—as this government's excellent investment in our nurses and midwives continues. If I had my way, they could enjoy the Andrews Labor government's free TAFE courses, which I would love to see at a new TAFE facility for Melton, although I have a few more arms to twist with that one. I will keep twisting them as much as I can.

The early learning centres attached to the new schools that this government is delivering are a game changer for families too as they avoid the dreaded double drop-off. We have seen that in local schools in particular—the new school at Eynesbury that was opened last year and the new school at Strathulloh that was opened this year. It certainly makes it much easier for parents to manage their children both at the early ages and then at school age. And of course families in Thornhill Park, which is coming into my electorate with the redistribution, will soon have these benefits too as we get on with delivering the new primary school and early learning centre there, ready to open up for the next school year. The families at Arnolds Creek have the benefit of this government's investment too. This is such an important change for our communities as not only is it saving them time, it is also reducing local traffic on roads that are already under pressure. The new schools and early childhood education centres mean less traffic in already established areas like Exford Road in Melton South. I am sure there are also environmental and safety benefits as many families reduce unnecessary trips.

This government, the Andrews Labor government, is proudly embarking on the largest early childhood investment in this state's history to give every Victorian child the best start in life. As part of this government's landmark reform agenda, we will be making kindergarten programs free from 2023, which will increase access to quality childhood education and give Victorian families more choice, more flexibility and certainly more money saved. Again, with that flexibility it will mean that parents will be able to access working hours more in regard to these free kindergarten programs. We will establish 50 government-operated childcare centres over the decade, of course ensuring that early childhood education is available in areas with the greatest unmet demand and providing convenient access for working parents, and that is the whole idea: allowing parents to have some freedom to be able to manage their working hours. We will also transition four-year-old kindergarten to pre-prep, with 30 hours of learning by 2032, creating a high-quality universal program to give four-year-old kids the opportunity to learn through play. This is all in addition to our ongoing nation-leading rollout of 15 hours of three-year-old kindergarten for Victorian children by 2029. Of course these transformational reforms speak for themselves. This government is absolutely committed to delivering quality, safe and accessible early childhood education to every Victorian child.

This bill is yet another example of that commitment, building on our track record. By amending the laws that regulate the quality and safety of early childhood services, this bill will ensure that oversight and compliance tools for early childhood regulators are as robust as possible. There are two main reasons for the amendments in this bill: to implement the outcomes of the five-yearly review of the national quality framework and also to enable the child safe standards to be enforced in early childhood services by the existing regulator, the Secretary of the Department of Education and Training. The national quality framework amendments will strengthen the safety of children and early childhood services and improve oversight and compliance tools for the regulatory authority, and the amendments are likely to lead to improvements in educator practices, qualifications and understandings, and

certainly improvements in families' understanding and awareness of service quality, safe practices and risk mitigation.

The bill also supports early childhood services to comply with child safe standards so that protecting children from harm and abuse is embedded in the everyday practice of leaders, staff and volunteers. The government consulted with the early childhood secretary in late 2021, and they expressed a strong desire to have integrated regulation of the child safe standards so it would minimise confusion, duplication and uncertainty for their services. The bill also contains amendments to the Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005 relating to the maternal and child health nursing services, and the Victorian maternal and child health service providers provide comprehensive and high-quality nursing care to Victorian families in the important early years.

The Andrews Labor government is committed to protecting the prerequisites for maternal and child health nurses to maintain the high standard of universal primary health services for all Victorian children and their families from birth to school age. The maternal and child health amendments in this bill safeguard the prerequisites to become part of the maternal and child health workforce and are consistent with the Andrews Labor government's commitment to delivering a high-quality maternal and child health service into the future. Victoria needs to ensure that this bill is passed in 2022 to enable an implementation of the outcomes of the five-year national quality framework review in mid-2023.

As my time elapses, I would also like to mention the huge benefit that early childhood education has within the childcare area. Today as the federal government prepares for the federal jobs summit, we see the importance of child care to empower women to re-enter the workforce and to continue their careers, but they still lack the support of free or low-cost child care. If the high cost of child care continues, there is little incentive for many to enter the workforce and especially cover some of the gaps that employers are facing right now. Education and child care is important to develop equality and pay equity, and the choice of both women and men to be carers of their family as well as have the opportunity for work and career needs to be on the same level.

We need to develop flexibility in our workplaces, but it is undeniable that early education and child care is critical in developing our children whilst also allowing flexibility back into the workforce. I just want to finish by thanking all those childcare workers and educators that are in the system now, with the pressures that have occurred over the last 2½ years. I thank them so much. They continue to do great work. I commend this bill to the house.

Mr M O'BRIEN (Malvern) (16:55): I am pleased to rise to speak on the Early Childhood Legislation Amendment Bill 2022. I acknowledge the contributions of all previous speakers and particularly my friend the member for Euroa, who I think gave a very passionate contribution and gave some very important food for thought about this workplace. My two kids are both teenagers now and well able to look after themselves, but when I was first elected to this place 16 years ago they were very young. I am married to a professional woman, and there is no doubt that my wife had to do a lot more of the heavy lifting when it came to looking after our young kids than I was able to—and partly because the facilities just did not exist here. I do think the member for Euroa in what was certainly not a valedictory but was getting close to that has put a very important item on the table for us to consider as a Parliament going forward. Nobody should be prevented or even discouraged from standing for election to this place because of the barrier of not being able to look after their kids.

This is a bill which is receiving bipartisan support because it is an acknowledgement that kindergarten is so important, and there is bipartisan support for the expansion of access to both three-year-old and four-year-old kinder in this state. But for kinders to be accessible they have to be open, and that is why I would like to direct my contribution to what is happening in my electorate, because there is a kindergarten, the Serrell Street kindergarten, in East Malvern which is a couple of good torpedo punts from my electorate office and one that I know very, very well. This is a kindergarten which has been operating for I think over 50 years now, and on 9 August the parents at this kindergarten received an email out of the blue advising that the kindergarten would be closing later this year, on 20 December.

Uniting (Victoria and Tasmania) Limited is the company that operates this. It is an arm of the Uniting Church but separate from the church itself, which owns the property.

Despite the email from Uniting talking about consultation, I am advised by parents that there was absolutely zero consultation from Uniting over the so-called '18-month consulting/planning period'. In fact as late as May this year the parents were offered places and increased hours for next year, not knowing what was happening in the background. As a consequence a lot of local families in my electorate are desperately worried. They know how important kindergarten is for three-year-olds and four-year-olds, and the idea that their local kinder will be closing down is something which is causing a great deal of angst amongst my families.

Uniting seem to think that there is a surplus of other available opportunities in the area, and I can tell them that there are not. Sunnyside kinder in Coinda Place has got waiting lists; Ewing kinder up the road, where my kids went, has got waiting lists. There just is not the availability for the families to get three-year-old and four-year-old kinder if Serrell Street closes down. I did write to the person concerned—I will not name her out of fairness—advising that this is causing a lot of distress amongst local families and seeking a meeting. I still have not had the courtesy of a response, which I think speaks volumes about the high-handed way in which Uniting Vic.Tas has been treating the families of my community. I have had a number of parents in my office, because I can tell you something about my community—they will stand up for their kids, and they are not going to take a backwards step. We have got some very hardworking, motivated and committed families in this electorate who are determined to see Serrell Street stay open.

As I mentioned earlier in my contribution, the land itself is not owned by Uniting Vic.Tas; it is owned by the local Uniting Church. The local Uniting Church is very pleased and happy to see a kindergarten continue on this site, and I commend the local Uniting Church for taking that very responsible viewpoint. I think some parents were initially concerned that the closure may be a precursor to flogging off the land, but I am sure that is not the case and that the land, which is owned by the church, is still going to be available for a kindergarten.

So what do we need to happen next? I have met with a number of parents, and can I say I was super impressed by how motivated these parents are. I will mention some of the ladies I have met with: Maria Hannan, Rachele McCutcheon, Helen Franzi and Alex Hepburn; and Alexis Harrison and Emma Yeo, who are the co-presidents of the Serrell Street parents advisory committee. I wrote to the Minister for Early Childhood and Pre-Prep, Minister Stitt, on 10 August seeking an urgent meeting with the families to help us work our way through this. The parents believe there is a wonderful opportunity for a parent-run, community-run kindergarten to take the place of the one that has been abandoned by Uniting. I wrote on the 10th, I received a letter 12 days later. I was a little bit disappointed that it took 12 days on what is an urgent matter when time is of the essence. The minister said:

In the first instance, I have requested the Department to continue to work with the approved provider to get a better understanding of the issue and to support families with their options for kindergarten in 2023.

Well, Minister, the approved provider is walking away. The approved provider has abandoned my community and my families. Do not talk to the approved provider; talk to the parents. They are the ones who are going to move heaven and earth to make sure there is a great future for a kindergarten at Serrell Street. And these are smart, motivated people. They have done their homework. They have dotted their i's; they have crossed their t's. What they need, Minister, is a government that is prepared to care, a government that is prepared to work with these parents, guide them through the red tape and guide them through the accreditation process. But we have to do it quickly, because if the parents of the community are not convinced that there is a future for Serrell Street next year, they will go elsewhere and then there will not be the critical mass of enrolments that we need to ensure that the Serrell Street kindergarten can continue as a going concern.

I will say this in writing again to the minister, but when this bill was on the government business program for this week I thought, 'It's just too good an opportunity, it's too timely for me not to take

this opportunity to plead with the minister: you can be a hero in my community if you work with these families, guide them through the bureaucracy, guide them through the red tape'. They are committed, they are smart and they will do what it takes to make sure that this kindergarten can continue in 2023 and beyond. That is my plea, Minister, to you.

The minister was on, I think, Virginia Trioli's ABC radio program last week. She was asked about Serrell Street kindergarten in East Malvern, as she was about one in the member for Niddrie's electorate. The minister sounded very positive, saying, 'Well, yes, we're helping the families'. What I would say, Minister, is that so far you have not been helping the families. The opportunity is there. This is not about politics. I just want these families looked after. I want these kids to have a kindergarten in the future where there has been one for 50 years. The community needs it. We have got waiting lists everywhere else.

Kindergarten is not just about the content of what you get taught in a kindergarten, it is about building community. And to build community it has got to be local. There is no point bussing kids across town or into different municipalities to go to their kindergarten. They need to go to kindergarten locally because that cohort is where those kids will be going to school, it is where they will be playing netball and basketball and footy and cricket and everything else. We have got to keep our local kindergartens. We cannot afford to lose Serrell Street. The minister said positive things on radio, but we have not seen that backed up with action. So, Minister, as I said, you have an opportunity to be a hero in Malvern East. And I will be the first person to praise you, Minister Stitt; I will be the first person to pat you on the back and say, 'Great job. Well done'. I do not care who gets the praise, I just want the outcome—and the outcome I want is a future for Serrell Street kindergarten. It is too important to the families; it is too important to the kids. I acknowledge this government has done some good things when it comes to expanding access to three-year-old and four-year-old kindergarten, but unless the kinders stay open, unless they stay local and unless they stay accessible—you can have all the hours you want, but we have to have open doors at kinders if we are going to make this work for Victorian kids.

Ms RICHARDS (Cranbourne) (17:05): I am very pleased to have the opportunity to speak on the Early Childhood Legislation Amendment Bill 2022, and of course this represents the best of us. If it ever was in doubt that we are absolutely the Education State—and it never would be—then you would only need to look at the reform agenda that we have had not just since I have been in this Parliament but since the Andrews Labor government first took office to see so many examples of that, and we have another one today. So I am incredibly proud to be part of a government that is willing and capable of putting forward landmark reform such as what we have got in front of us today.

I am pleased that the member for Malvern said that he would be the first to congratulate the minister as it relates to the issues that have been canvassed.

Mr M O'Brien: If she gets the results.

Ms RICHARDS: Well, I will be one of many who is going to say how pleased I am to see the reform and action that is taking place across so many areas of interest, but I will pay credit as well to the department and the minister's office for the extraordinary work that has gone into making sure that we are leading the country—and that is what this legislation absolutely does. It demonstrates that we are leading the country.

This bill responds to the recommendations of the 2019 national quality framework review, and it makes relevant changes to the Children's Services Act 1996 and amends the Education and Care Services National Law Act 2010 to remove the requirement to doubly table the annual report of the national authority. I know that was canvassed previously, including by the member for Croydon. I caught his contribution as he spoke about that as well. It is incredibly important that the Victorian regulatory authority under the national law and the Children's Services Act be the integrated sector regulator of the new child safe standards for the early childhood sector.

Stakeholders in the early childhood education and maternal and child health sectors have had strong expectations that the national quality framework would be implemented as soon as possible, and that is reflected in the implementation agenda behind this bill. People used to call early childhood child care, and I think the evolution of that has been a really important evolution, where we do not talk about children being cared for anymore, we talk about them as being in early education settings and early educators as the people who have that responsibility.

The science is really clear. It has been clear for a long time, and this government is demonstrating once again its commitment. The science shows that the investment we make in our youngest Victorians is an investment that has extraordinary dividends, multiplying dividends, through a lifetime. There is nothing, in my view, as heartbreaking as having families not being able to afford the best start in life for their children, whether it is in the healthcare area or in education—the two priorities obviously of a Labor government and of all Labor governments, I would say. To have the opportunity to be able to send your children to a high-quality early education setting where they are safe and well looked after but also where they have the stimulation that we all want for our children is part of what we are looking at with this extraordinary reform agenda and part of what is considered before us today. I am pleased that those opposite are not opposing it.

In the real world this translates to high-quality services that make sure that our maternal and child health nurses as well have the quality and sustainability to be able to respond to families across Victoria. Of course Cranbourne is known as one of the fastest growing areas in the state, and I certainly wake up to the sound of children up and down the street. My children are much older now, but I did start my perhaps political interest as somebody on a committee of management when my oldest daughter was three years old. I started becoming involved in the local kinder on the committee of management and was in awe of our educators and the role that they played in getting my kids and all the children in the community the best start in life. It is also a place where people do come together and spend time with each other, actually, shoulder to shoulder, so having child safe standards embedded into law that protect children from harm is central in the everyday operation of not just early childhood educators and leaders but staff and volunteers as well across these maternal and child health services.

The safety of children in early childhood services is vitally important, and this bill makes sure that there are no gaps in the quality of these services. Passing this bill will enable the implementation of the outcomes of the five-year national quality framework review in mid-2023, and these regular reviews ensure the regulatory systems supported by the governments in Australia are current and continue to drive quality improvement. I will just point out again that in this state we are taking a coordination role in this. That leadership that we have seen in so many ways is demonstrated in the collaboration and cooperation across states, and in fact I saw the demonstration of some extraordinary collaboration and cooperation across states today. In fact I might have caught some great endorsement of the approach that is being taken in Victoria by the Premier of another state, so that collaboration and cooperation is really important, as is the leadership that the Victorian government is taking in so many ways.

Cranbourne has some of the most extraordinary early childhood educators and services, and our families deserve it—they absolutely deserve the best start. I do want to mention Jackie, a family day carer who has a special place in my heart for the approach that she took to early childhood education and the way that she put not just her heart and her soul but her background as somebody who speaks many, many languages at the centre of the way that she approached the profession.

I do want to also acknowledge some of the new and well-loved centres in Cranbourne. The Botanic Ridge early childhood education centre is located at the Botanic Ridge Primary School and does of course eliminate that double drop-off. And it is not just a drama; this is a social equity issue. I know from many of our discussions around gender responsive budgeting and the ways that we can change the way services operate, eliminating a double drop-off is part of that. So the way that the Botanic Ridge early childhood centre has eliminated that has made a huge difference.

I would also like to pay credit to Carlisle Park family and children's centre and Clyde Creek as well, which I have been able to visit recently and spend time in with our educators, and Arbourlea as well and Little Stars and of course Aspire. These are extraordinary services, and the aspiration of the educators for their children reflects perfectly and mirrors perfectly the aspiration that so many in my community have for their own families and is the reason that in some contexts—many contexts in fact—they have made really dramatic decisions to move to Cranbourne, sometimes from other parts of Victoria, often from other parts of Australia and many from other countries, to get that best start for their children.

We have a new school opening in the Quarters estate—the Quarters Primary School—and that is also going to have an early parenting centre. We also have an early parenting centre on Matterhorn Drive in Clyde North, which is really important to the member for Bass, being located in the member for Bass's electorate and serving so many of our community. It is going to make such a difference. And we are upgrading Marnebek School. It is a massive upgrade. It is part of our upgrades to every special school in Victoria and again a commitment to early childhood and the importance of making sure that these services are available for all Victorians and certainly the many people who are in Cranbourne.

A small change can make a huge difference in our community. Legislation like this makes a huge difference to the lives of our youngest Victorians. It makes the hearts of so many families sing. I can say I can go for weeks and weeks and weeks before somebody says something other than that education is a priority for them when it comes to their children. The future is bright. There is so much going on in Cranbourne. There is so much going on in the state of Victoria. There is a lot of hi-vis. There are a lot of early childhood educators. The focus on our youngest Victorians, the focus on our early childhood settings, is a credit to us. It is a credit to the minister, the work that is being done, and I commend the bill to the house.

Ms McLEISH (Eildon) (17:15): I rise to speak on the Early Childhood Legislation Amendment Bill 2022. I do so with mixed feelings about it, because this is about making child care better, which is what we all want, but at the same time—and members have been raising issues with the current early childhood sector—it is causing a lot of angst for parents. I think everybody in this place would certainly agree that making early childhood experiences and education better is something that is paramount, and I will talk a little bit more as we go on.

This bill, I note, amends a number of acts: the Education and Care Services National Law Act 2010, the Children's Services Act 1996 and the Child Wellbeing and Safety (Child Safe Standards Compliance and Enforcement) Amendment Act 2021. It amends the Education and Care Services National Law set out in the schedule to the Education and Care Services National Law Act.

Everyone is committed to quality early childhood education and care, and there are pretty obvious reasons why we would do this. We know that if kids have a great start in life, it sets them up well. It sets them up in so many areas—their health and education. It teaches them to deal with other kids. It teaches them to deal with adults, because they have got the teachers and they have got other parents who might come in. It teaches them to learn rules and understand how to operate in that social environment. It is particularly important. For many it is the introduction to reading, counting and things like that, which we know are so important. We also know that quality care includes safety and making sure that our kindergartens and early childcare centres are safe places from predators—stopping people who should not be there from getting in the front gate—and secure, stopping kids from getting out. We have had a few too many instances lately of where children have managed to sneak through the gates and have caused all sorts of angst for everybody, and we need to make sure that things like that just do not happen.

This bill is really about creating the right environment for kids to thrive and having the right regulatory systems in place, and we are not opposing the bill for those reasons. Interestingly, we have the national law—the Education and Care Services National Law, which is always referred to as the national law—and we have got the national quality framework, which is interrelated here. There was a review of the

quality framework in 2019. Finally—and I expect that it was the matter of COVID that may have got in the way—on 6 May this year the education ministers met and endorsed the final review package. It recommended changes to the quality framework and included drafting instructions giving effect to amendments to the national law from those recommendations, as had been agreed. Because it is the national law, it requires a host state to initiate these changes, and that is Victoria in this instance. Once it gets embedded here, then it is typically rolled out in other states. Western Australia has a bit of a different system.

I am going to touch just briefly on family day care because the bill makes a number of changes in this area. Children are looked after in family day care. It is a smaller, intimate setting in a home or other approved premises. There are obviously loads of rules and regulations. If you have a look at the website, there are so many pages of policies about indoor and outdoor requirements, staffing arrangements, child protection, medical conditions, visitors to the premises and interactions with children. But also, importantly, family day care educators must not educate and care for more than seven children at a family day care residence or approved day care venue at any one time. For many people, certainly in remoter areas, this is often the only option because it is very difficult to get day care or kindergartens up and running. Some of the changes that are here enable improved access for the regulatory authorities to family day care. Residents leave all the information on the service register. It enables risk-based, proactive approaches to regulation and helps assist in the identification of the day care educators during emergency situations—and things do happen. In my area bushfires are emergency situations. We have major storms and floods that happen. You can have other factors—external factors—of parents and different things that put a lot of stress on those educators, so being able to assist them in those situations is good. It also requires that all family day care coordinators complete child protection training prior to commencing employment—that is pretty good too—and that there be a more rigorous assessment of the fitness and propriety of the services across the state.

Everybody wants the best for their children, and I think everybody here wants the best for the future generations. Rarely do I hear a complaint from the early childcare sector about the education component, about what they are getting or about the level of care. I hear a lot of complaints, though, as have others who have already mentioned them, about the workforce, about the governance and about the stresses that are being put on them as it changes to increasing hours. Everyone agrees with increasing hours for three-year-olds to 15 hours and for pre-preps to 30 hours of play-based care over the next decade. My daughter did a pre-prep program, and it was absolutely fantastic. She got a lot out of that, and I would highly recommend it. I am excited about this, but it also puts a lot of stress on the current operators about how they are going to manage that and how they are going to find the workforce, because at the moment we have a workforce that is, like so many other areas, struggling. It is under so much pressure.

And we have governance issues as well. I want to outline a couple of local issues that highlight this. Panton Hill kindergarten is one, Acting Speaker Ward, that you would know quite well. It has for years been under pressure. It is in a smaller area, but it is the closest kindergarten to other areas in my electorate, such as St Andrews, Strathewen and Smiths Gully. That kindergarten is so important because it feeds into St Andrews and Strathewen primary schools and Panton Hill Primary School. It is really important that you have got a local kinder to feed into the local schools so they do not have to move away. In 2020 the program no longer had a suitably qualified staff member to offer kindergarten to children. When that was known, the number of registrations, as you could imagine, started to plummet, and then they got on this downward spiral: they were trying to recruit somebody to fill that role, they were not able to fill it, parents started talking and parents very much worried about what the future of their children's kindergarten was going to be. The provider that was there tried to recruit for a considerable period of time, until December 2021, without success.

They looked at every avenue. There were members of Parliament contacted. The council was contacted to try and work out how best to come up with a solution. The pressure was such that if it was not found by the end of June, if there was not a solution, this kindergarten could close, and that

would have devastating consequences for the primary schools in Panton Hill and other areas. Kangaroo Ground Pre-school was having a look. Finally, council did find a solution: Diamond Creek Memorial Kindergarten taking it on. But council tried to work with the Department of Education and Training since being notified of Sparkways's intention to divest from the Nillumbik primary schools. I have got to say, the council asked DET to undertake an expression-of-interest process to find new providers, as had been done in the case of the Bestchance divestments; that was refused. They invited them to be on the assessment panel for the EOI, but the request was declined. In February this year they did meet with the reps about the communications plan for families and to explore other possibilities. Now, we did, as I said, find a solution there, which was terrific.

The other issue I want to talk about is governance. I met very recently with Alexandra kindergarten, which has 11 staff, I think. Its committee is finding it really quite overwhelming at times because people have been sick, and there has been a lot of sickness with COVID. Families who are on the committee—it is owned locally; they own the premises and there is no council involvement—are really stressed. The committee is stressed because it thinks it has a bigger job than what it can deal with, so committee members are opting out. The kindergarten is extremely worried that if it cannot get a committee that has the time and effort to put into this, it would have to close. I hear similar things in Mansfield about the shortage of placements in kindergarten and early child care. It puts so much pressure on the communities. We have not been able to have people come to the town because they cannot get placements in kindergarten and child care. There is a lot of concern out there about the future of kindergartens. I do not think we have landed on the right models yet. There is still a lot to be done.

Mr HAMER (Box Hill) (17:25): It is a delight that I rise this evening to contribute on the Early Childhood Legislation Amendment Bill 2022. At the outset I want to congratulate the minister and her staff for bringing this very important bill to the house today and in particular pay tribute to all of the minister's work in this space. There are some fantastic initiatives in the early childhood space that this government has delivered, and I dare say it has probably been amongst the most significant policy reforms that we have seen from a government that has made a lot of significant policy reforms. The reforms in the early childhood space will I think certainly have long-lasting effects and be very significant for many, many years to come.

I just wanted to, I suppose, review the purpose of the legislation, the main objectives of the legislation. The bill will amend the Education and Care Services National Law to implement the recommendations arising from the 2019 national quality framework review. It will also amend a number of other pieces of legislation, including the Children's Services Act 1996 and the Child Wellbeing and Safety (Child Safe Standards Compliance and Enforcement) Amendment Act 2021. The bill's main objectives, as have been outlined by other speakers, are to implement the outcomes of the review of the national quality framework, which is the national regulatory scheme for early childhood services, and to enable the child safe standards to be enforced in early childhood services by the existing regulator in an integrated manner. These changes are really important to protect and support our early childcare system. It will make it safer for children and lift the quality of services, in particular identifying a range of measures within the family day care space, which is an important element of the early childhood sector, to provide that sort of service for a number of families. In particular it will require family day care coordinators to complete child protection training prior to commencing employment and also enable the regulator to have improved access to information about the types of homes and buildings that family day care operators are working from. The changes, including the compliance and incorporation of the child safe standards, will further embed the protection of children from harm in the everyday practice of the leaders, staff and volunteers.

I want to particularly reflect on our government's record—the Andrews government's record, the Labor government's record—on investment in early childhood education. It is something that has been significant. As I said, in my mind it is probably one of the most significant policy changes that has been developed over the course of the eight years of the Andrews government. It is not a change that will just affect three- and four-year-old children at that particular time. The education that the children

receive in that period of time in their lives is long lasting. It will have an effect throughout their education and throughout their lives as adults, having that grounding. I see from my own children now having completed that phase in their life just how much of a difference that was able to make to their level of education, their level of readiness for prep and their level of educational maturity—the ability to provide that universal three-year-old kinder.

And now a universal pre-prep education of 30 hours is just such an invaluable tool and step up that is being provided to our youngest Victorians, allowing all of those Victorians and all of those young students to get the best possible start in life and be ready to take on their prep education, their primary school education and their secondary school education, finish their schooling and go on to further studies and further work in a much stronger position. That is leaving aside obviously all of the other benefits, economic and social benefits, that come from the investment in early childhood education, which of course is particularly pertinent at the moment when we talk about access to the workforce, participation in the workforce and enabling particularly women, who overwhelmingly continue to have a part-time carer and part-time work role for a while before children enter full-time schooling. I know from speaking to many friends and constituents who have children at that age just how much of a barrier it can be when the cost of preschool education is so high that working an extra day to put a child in child care just does not make any financial sense. So having that access to the universal free kinder program is a huge bonus from a social, an economic and an educational perspective.

I do also want to give a shout-out to a number of our local early childhood providers. We have some fantastic local kinders in the Box Hill electorate who provide an outstanding level of care. I happened to visit one last week, the Goodstart Early Learning centre in Mont Albert. I was invited down for Book Week, and I think the children got a bit of a surprise when Harry Potter turned up. I am not sure if they really knew who Harry Potter was, but we did try and surprise them with that. I did manage to somehow keep them occupied and engaged for 20 or 30 minutes, which is probably more than the length of time that I can keep my own children engaged. It just goes to show the level of engagement and participation that occurs at these early childhood centres.

I also want to give a shout-out to the Box Hill North Primary School kinder. This is a facility that has operated since the mid-1990s. It was really, I guess, a precursor to the policy that the Andrews government introduced over the last few years in terms of the co-location of kinders with primary schools to avoid the double drop-off. There was a lot of foresight in the Box Hill North community some 25 years ago or so when they established the kinder on site. There are some fantastic building works which are going on for the primary school, and it will be an easy transition linking the kinder at that school site with the primary school, not only making it easier for parents to do the single drop-off but particularly easing the transition for the children. Already Box Hill North Primary was one of the schools that runs a language program within their four-year-old kinder program. They teach Japanese through the primary school, and they are teaching it in the kindergarten as well. This just further enhances the transition from those early childhood learnings through to the primary school. There are many good elements of the bill, and I commend the bill to the house.

Ms Connolly interjected.

Ms KEALY (Lowan) (17:35): No, I would not like to be the member for Tarneit. I would much prefer to have one-sixth of the state under my jurisdiction, and we have a fabulous region over in far-western Victoria. But one of the biggest challenges that we do have in our region is access to child care. In fact in most of our region—whether you look in the northern part of the Lowan electorate, through the Grampians region, or you look in the south through the Glenelg region, as it has been classified, under the Mitchell Institute's paper, which has been cited regularly throughout this debate—we are well and truly within a childcare desert. If you look at the map that was produced by the Mitchell Institute, most of far-western Victoria is in the deep red. The deep red represents zero access to child care in most areas of my electorate.

We know the population is dispersed greatly across far western Victoria. The further you get from Melbourne, the farther apart people tend to live, and you can travel many, many kilometres before you even see a house in my part of the state. However, that does not mean that people who choose to live in far western Victoria should not have an opportunity to have equitable access to child care. Particularly they need to have equitable access to child care because we know that there is such a close linkage between female workforce participation and access to child care. I would like to specifically focus on the areas of my electorate of Minyip, Murtoa and Rupanyup. This area is known as Dunmunkle region. They have a number of childcare workers who actually live in this area, but they do not have a childcare facility to be able to work from. As a result, we have got a lot of workers who actually leave that region of Minyip, Murtoa and Rupanyup, drive their children to Horsham to drop them off and then drive to Warracknabeal to work in a childcare facility there. At the end of the day they drive back to Horsham to pick up their kids and go back to Dunmunkle. So they are basically unable to access child care. Their nearest childcare centre is about 40 minutes to an hour away.

Yarriambiack council have done a fabulous job in trying to advocate and secure funding to build a purpose-built childcare facility in that local area. They have been fabulous advocates. It was originally under the advocacy of the former CEO, Jessie Holmes. Now Tammy is doing a fabulous job of continuing to pursue that. I know that the minister has recently agreed to meet with Yarriambiack Shire Council to try and progress this fabulous opportunity to build a childcare facility in the Dunmunkle area, most likely to be located in Murtoa. However, when they wrote and they provided it—they actually applied for a grant for childcare infrastructure, early years infrastructure—they were told, ‘No, you’re not eligible because you’re not in a growth corridor’. My message to this government is that it does not matter if you are in a growth corridor or not. If women are unable to go to work because they cannot secure child care, then it is prohibiting them—

Ms Thomas: Which is a federal government responsibility, and your mob had nine years to fix it.

Ms KEALY: I will take up the interjection from the Minister for Health because the Minister for Health has made a comment that this is not a state responsibility, it is a federal responsibility. I would like to contest that because I am actually referring to a state government fund that was established by this Labor government, and they refused to provide funding to Yarriambiack because it was not in a growth corridor. The women who work in that area, and there are a number of women who have approached me, are ICU nurses, paramedics, agronomists—they are working very, very hard. They would love to do more, but they cannot because they cannot access child care. So while the Minister for Health might try and defend the fact that the Labor government will not invest in childcare facilities in rural and regional Victoria, she actually should be the strongest advocate, because I know of a number of nurses who would be able to go and return to work and take pressure off the healthcare system, which is in utter crisis.

Ms Thomas: On a point of order, Acting Speaker, firstly, the member on her feet is taking up interjections, which you know is unparliamentary, but I would also make the point that the member is actually inaccurate in what she is saying. The Victorian Labor government is investing where the previous federal Liberal-National government failed to deliver the child care that people across rural and regional Victoria need.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Ms Crugnale): The member will continue.

Ms KEALY: Thank you. It is fascinating, isn’t it, to raise a point of order for someone accepting your own interjection, which was also fatally flawed because I have got a letter from Yarriambiack Shire Council that says the state Labor government will not give them funding for a childcare centre because they are not in a growth corridor. They are going to redirect it to city places instead where there is already competition in terms of the availability of childcare centres. So yet again the Minister for Health is missing the point that she could have more nurses working in Wimmera Base Hospital if she supported a new childcare centre in the Dunmunkle region in Murtoa and perhaps even looked at expanding our childcare availability in all of the Lowan electorate.

I look at Horsham: there is actually a three-year waiting list to get your child into child care at the moment. That is a lot of forward planning when it comes to pregnancy to know three years in advance that you are going to need a childcare place. We know that in that region there are 2.59 children per childcare place available. There is a childcare facility in Horsham. It was stricken by fire and needs repairs, but again it was not eligible because it was not in a metropolitan seat. This is completely wrong, because women who live in rural and regional areas absolutely deserve access to child care, because they want to return to work. We have seen similar scenarios in Edenhope in far western Victoria, the town that I grew up in and the town where I was living immediately before I became a member of Parliament. One of the reasons I had to leave Edenhope is that I could not access child care in that town, so that forced me to move to Horsham, where I was able to access some child care for my little boy. There are women in Edenhope who still are unable to access long day care in Edenhope.

One of the challenges is that this legislation is not actually addressing some of the problems around the inconsistencies between ratios and other regulatory matters between family day care, occasional care, long day care and other in-venue care. There really is a massive challenge when it comes to that, and it is not about the actual childcare workers but the sheer level of administration and red tape. I know that that is put in place to try and protect children, but not providing any additional support for childcare workers to be able to meet those requirements and the additional reporting burden upon them is actually a barrier to people operating their own family day care service. As an extreme example, I have been through the fabulous facility at Donald, where they have got two rooms, but there is a limitation. There is a legislative barrier where you cannot have two family day care operators operating under the same roof line, because it is the same address. These are the sorts of things that you do not see as a problem in metropolitan Melbourne, but these are massive challenges when it comes to delivering childcare support in rural and regional Victoria. In Lake Bolac they have had a similar issue in their ability to have continuity of day care services simply because the level of regulatory red tape means that the staff have to put so much time into meeting that administrative burden that it cuts back on the hours where they can actually provide care to people.

I am not saying there should not be any regulation at all. We need to make sure that we are providing a safe environment, that our kids are able to be protected when they are in care and also that parents have peace of mind that their children are safe when they are in care. However, we need to get this balance right, and there are some very, very straightforward, simple solutions that are available to the government that would help to ease the burden and to take pressure off the family day care operators in particular but also all sectors of child care.

What we need more than anything else is more childcare workers. There is so much pressure to be able to train and to get enough workers to deliver all of the childcare programs that are available. In many instances that is the limiting factor rather than infrastructure. And that has been exacerbated by three- and four-year-old kinder. I do not begrudge that program; it is great to have. But there should have been more planning in place to make sure there were sufficient childcare workers so that we were not robbing childcare operators to put in kindergarten places and then ending up with parents who are unable to do it.

Ms Thomas: If only the federal government had done something about it. If only they had done something in the nine years they were in charge of child care.

Ms KEALY: Again, I will take the interjection from the Minister for Health, who again wants to blame the federal government. You know what, it is a federal Labor government now. We have got a state health minister who wants to blame anyone but her own government. You know what, the state government is responsible for a vast number of funds about infrastructure for child care. They refuse to invest in rural and regional areas. They have said, 'It's not in a growth corridor'. They have refused to invest in the childcare workforce. Only a Liberal-Nationals government will fix this.

Ms CONNOLLY (Tarneit) (17:45): Here I am in the flesh, and it is always such a pleasure to follow the member for Lowan. I am going to start by making the point that we had to endure almost a

decade of a federal Liberal government who did nothing in the childcare sector and nothing in our aged care sector, including giving these workers a pay rise, for God's sake. I speak passionately about that because my sister is an early childhood educator. My mother started off as an early childhood educator, and she started off doing family day care at home. My mother-in-law is an early childhood educator and started off doing family day care at home. In fact my husband and I—little did we know at the time; it might have been one of the things that we had in common—grew up as the children of family day carers. We were raised there in the home with our mums, who stayed at home raising us but also raising a whole lot of other kids in the community. Our parents—my mum, Jenny Keys, and my husband's mum, who is actually at home with my kids right now, Aileen Connolly—are two awesome women that helped raise and educate, I am going to say at least, over the decades that they were early childhood educators, probably hundreds of kids, right? Aileen is now in her 70s, and my mum is close to 70 but still in the 60 age range. Both of them have also gone on to work in aged care. One thing that they both talk about having in common is that workers in early childhood education need a pay rise and workers in aged care also need a pay rise. They are two very lowly paid jobs, but they are absolutely essential workers for our kids at the beginning of their life and for people towards the end of their life. Incredible workers our early childhood educators are, and I give them a huge shout-out. I note that the member for Lowan, in her contribution on this bill, failed to say this once at least with any kind of passion or conviction about these workers.

I cannot discuss this bill, the Early Childhood Legislation Amendment Bill 2022, without expressing my emphatic support for our government's Best Start, Best Life initiative. I can talk about this as the member for Tarnait. I have a lot of credibility in this space because in my community the largest proportion of workers is in the early childhood education space. Folks in Tarnait are working in our kinders as family day care workers and in our long day care centres, doing an incredible job raising the next generation. The Best Start, Best Life initiative is making kinder free for every Victorian child. I would like to think that there is not one parent in this chamber that never, at some time or another, had their kids go to kinder or long day care and then had to make a decision when returning from maternity leave or parental leave: do I do two days or do I do three days? It was all about how much of your wage was going to be eaten up by childcare fees. I worked part time for a decade, and that was a conversation about my kids, who went to child care and then on to kinder. That was a conversation in my household that we had every single year. I remember it clearly.

What we are doing—this government, this side of the house—is we are making kinder free for every Victorian child, along with an extra year of pre-prep kinder. This policy is an absolute game changer for Victorian families, and for so many reasons that people on this side of the house have talked about so passionately this afternoon. This fantastic initiative results in a \$2500 a year saving. That is what families are going to save under this program. That is a family holiday for some families. At a time like this, when families are feeling the pressure from the cost of living, this is absolutely huge; it is a game changer. My community is absolutely 100 per cent embracing this. It means more parents will go back to work, especially women, boosting household incomes, and it is going to benefit our economy overall. And let us face it—I am thinking about my kids' ages, and I worked part-time for a decade—women have been having this conversation and wanting this for a very, very long time. Women in Victoria, I say to you: this announcement is for you. This is going to benefit you while your children are young. This is going to put more money in your family budget at the end of every single week, and it is going to help you in your career. It is going to enable you to work three days instead of two or go back four days instead of three or even five days instead of four. Whatever you want to choose—and it is all about choice—the choice is ultimately up to you.

It is also going to mean jobs in early childhood education. Whether I am doing street stalls or at train stations or I am meeting with constituents, I come in contact with early childhood educators almost every single day as the member for Tarnait, and they are very, very excited about this reform. They are also excited about this reform because our early childhood educators are working with kids, many of whom they know are going to get a better start in life because they are getting that kickstart in their education. This is a really great announcement, and these are the kinds of reforms that Labor

governments are known for. As the member for Lowan just mentioned, yes, we do have a federal Labor government now. They have just, I think, checking on Instagram, clicked over 100 days. Federal Labor governments are known for massive amounts of reform that contribute to and raise the quality of life and living for folks here in Australia and Victoria. That is what federal Labor governments do. That is what almost a decade of a federal Liberal government failed to do.

For families living in Tarneit, amendments to early childhood legislation, whether they know about them or it just happens and they go about their daily life—they benefit from them. They are really important, because we are a young electorate. I used to think I was pretty close to the median demographic, but four years on, being in this place and then clocking over the big four-zero in December, I am a little bit older than that demographic. That demographic is two parents, 32 years old with two small kids who are eligible to be in long day care or kinder programs or are at primary school. We are a young community, and young communities need a bit more money in the family budget every week. They need the option when it comes to going to work, because many of them have a mortgage and they need two incomes to pay that. But they also see the benefits of education, early education, early on for their kids. They know that it makes a difference.

It is not just the parents of the kids who are going to benefit from the investment in their education and their needs into the future. We are talking about another year of pre-prep kinder—and I always find it funny saying ‘pre-prep kinder’, because I grew up in New South Wales and I do not think the word ‘kinder’ existed; it was ‘kindy’. I always want to call it ‘kindy’—‘kindy for kids’. I always think that sounds kind of cool.

Mr M O’Brien: You probably like ‘parmy’ as well, don’t you?

Ms CONNOLLY: It is very controversial. I am putting it all on display here this afternoon. We know kindy gives kids a great start in life and, whether they are starting at age three or starting at age four, by the time they get to prep they are able to do a lot better. We know it is going to boost the child’s ability to learn once they start in that primary school, and in my electorate, where there is a huge multicultural melting pot of people from across the world but there are also families who have suffered from generational systemic disadvantage, I know, and early childhood educators know, that from those kids having extra hours, because kinder and this pre-prep are free, those children will benefit most of all. By the time they come to prep they are ready to get that great start and that great education in life. I have talked a lot about how wonderful our government announcement is and given a huge shout-out to our early childhood educators and probably talked very little about this bill, but small changes can always result in big changes overall.

This bill in the end, when it comes down to the core of it, is about making our kids safer when they are in care, whether in family day care, kinder or long day care. It is making them safer. At the end of the day there is no parent that would say that improving the safety of their kids while in care is a bad thing. This is a great, great bill. I commend the minister for bringing it forward, and I commend the bill to the house.

Mr ROWSWELL (Sandringham) (17:55): I also rise to speak on the Early Childhood Legislation Amendment Bill 2022. I will say at the outset I was particularly interested in the contribution earlier this afternoon from my colleague the member for Euroa. I think the member for Euroa shared with the Parliament from the heart and really spoke from the heart about her own experiences. For those interested in understanding more about some of the challenges of the vocational journey of being a member of Parliament, I would commend the member for Euroa’s speech to their consideration.

This bill seeks to enhance the regulatory system for early childhood education in Victoria and nationally. The bill proposes various amendments to several acts, as outlined. This follows the 2019 national quality framework review aimed at ensuring that the NQF continues to meet its objectives and considers the ongoing effectiveness and sustainability of the NQF considering the continuing evolution of the education and care sector. The bill has a number of main provisions, including making

a number of amendments to make child care safer for children and lift the quality of services. The bill requires all family day care coordinators to complete child protection training prior to commencing employment. The bill provides for greater access to information about family day care providers by regulatory authorities, in this case the department. The regulator will be able to assess the fitness more rigorously of service providers across the sector. The bill also makes some minor amendments relating to maternal and child health nursing services to require providers of maternal and child health nursing services to employ or engage only if they have a prescribed prerequisite.

In short, this bill is about making several amendments to make child care safer for children and to lift the quality of services. In the consultation that the Liberal-Nationals took in relation to this bill with the early childhood sector and broader stakeholders in Victoria, all of those people that were engaged by us through that consultation period raised no concerns with the bill. As such the opposition will not be opposing the legislation before the Parliament.

I do want to use this opportunity to draw the house's attention to a number of local matters in my community. I have spoken previously about the circumstance of Bambini Early Learning Centre on Bluff Road in Sandringham. Now, very recently there was a serious accident involving one of the educators at Bambini Early Learning Centre as they attempted to cross Bluff Road on their way to work. Bluff Road is a busy arterial road in my community connecting Beach Road to Nepean Highway. As such it is frequently used, especially at peak times. That particular early learning centre, Bambini on Bluff Road, has over 150 children, and you can imagine at drop-off and pick-up times it is particularly busy for those families and for the people who work at that centre as well.

I am pleased to report that together with my colleague the member for Brighton we wrote to the Minister for Roads and Road Safety expressing concern about the circumstance at Bluff Road at the Bambini Early Learning Centre. Just today we received a positive response from the minister for roads, which I did want to acknowledge in this contribution because the minister for roads has instructed or requested his department, the Department of Transport, to undertake a site investigation of Bluff Road just outside the Bambini Early Learning Centre. They have identified the need for greater warning signs outside the early learning centre. The signs that are proposed will read 'Preschool', and I think they will be yellow in colour—and it is a step in the right direction. What the community was looking for was 'Keep clear' signs. My understanding from the minister's correspondence received today is that the request for 'Keep clear' signs on Bluff Road outside Bambini Early Learning Centre does not meet the criteria set out by the Department of Transport. But they have compromised, which is a step in the right direction, and I am informed by the minister that some pedestrian warning signs reading 'Preschool' will be installed on the approaches to that early learning centre. This is a win—a win for my community and a win for common sense. I thank the minister for his cooperation in this regard.

Recently also I had the great pleasure of visiting the Minnows early learning centre in Beaumaris and presenting them with—well, a couple of months ago at least—some Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander flags. It was just wonderful to spend time with the kids there, it really was, and their educators as well, presenting them with those flags and also speaking to them about the importance of those flags. I was very impressed by their knowledge of the Aboriginal flag, actually, and their knowledge of the symbolism of the colours on the flag and a little bit of the history about it as well. We discussed very briefly flag etiquette as well, which I thought was an important thing to do as I did not want national flags of Australia to be dropped on the floor by the kinder kids at the Minnows early learning centre in Beaumaris.

Very recently I have worked with the Sandringham Children's Centre in Bay Road in Sandringham. There is a rather inappropriate development proposed for just across the road from the Sandringham Children's Centre in Bay Road, and I have worked with them to add my voice of concern and objection to that proposed development on Bay Road, conveying that to Bayside council.

I want to use the time left to me to remind the house that next Wednesday, 7 September, is in fact Early Childhood Educators' Day. It is an opportunity for us as a Parliament and for us as a community

to celebrate the contribution of early childhood educators. I have my own experience. My kids are at Sandringham Children's Centre. My goodness, they are marvellous; they really are—the educators there and the centre director, Lauren, those educators that take care of my two children and the children of many other parents in our community.

I just want to give you a sense of the community that we have at that early learning centre, Sandringham Children's Centre in Bay Road in Sandringham. One of the parents in our WhatsApp group very recently drew everyone's attention to the fact that next Wednesday, 7 September, is Early Childhood Educators Day, and Sarah, one of the parents, proposed that we get together and send on 7 September some hampers and some platters, lunches, pastries and other delicious sweet treats to the early childhood educators at the Sandringham Children's Centre. It did not take long after Sarah made that wonderful suggestion for many of the other parents to jump on board and to contribute to that wonderful suggestion. And that is what we are doing—because we as parents recognise the important contribution of early childhood educators to the lives of our own children, and we want to acknowledge that in a particularly special way.

So I think it is terrific that this bill in fact makes several amendments to make child care safer for children and lifts the quality of services in early childhood learning, and as I said, the opposition will not be opposing this bill.

Mr CHEESEMAN (South Barwon) (18:05): It is with some pleasure that I rise this afternoon to speak on the Early Childhood Legislation Amendment Bill 2022. Before I turn my contribution to some of the key issues as I see them in terms of early childhood education, I just want to from the outset reflect on the consequences, effectively, over a very, very long time of the Labor Party putting into this chamber a huge number of women. In fact we now have, I think, more than 50 per cent of members of the Labor Party here in this chamber made up by women, and we have at least 50 per cent of the cabinet made up by women. From my end, when a political party makes decisions like that, as a consequence we see public policy brought to this place that reflects the challenges that women particularly have to deal with in their normal lives as they go about their roles in society. What I have noticed and what I have had the pleasure of observing and witnessing is that a very, very significant proportion of the policy drive of this government has in fact been made by women in our political party driving that reform agenda. Indeed all of the reform work that we are putting in in the early childhood legislation space has been driven, from my observation, by women in our government. I commend the minister in the other place for her significant contribution in this space. I have no doubt that there will be a very large team of empowered women in the bureaucracy providing guidance and advice as she goes about implementing our very, very substantial reform agenda.

I have had an enormous amount of pleasure in being an active father in my kids' lives, and I have had the opportunity over many years really to engage with my electorate on some of the key challenges. Early childhood education, I think, is one of those great challenges that many families are reflecting on and are considering, particularly in the growth corridor of Geelong, which makes up a very substantial proportion of my seat. What I have found through engagement with those communities is that child care and education, particularly early pre-school education—kinder—is something that is highly sought after. It is highly valued by my families, but it is prohibitively expensive and difficult for families to be able to access in an affordable way. Sadly, those families that find themselves in financial difficulties often cannot afford the quality of care that their kids so desperately deserve. I think this reform will go a long way over the next decade or so to making a huge difference to young people in my electorate.

Some of the modelling that the government has done has identified that it can cost many, many thousands of dollars per child. Indeed the reality is that a large amount of time, generally by women, is dedicated to looking after children, particularly those children who are not old enough to head off to school. Whilst I know women enjoy that experience, the reality is for most of them if they were given that opportunity of going back to work earlier, that would be a huge saving to their household budget. It would also be hugely beneficial, enabling them to take the career steps that they would like

to be able to do—not just having a consequence immediately in terms of their take-home pay, but I think importantly in having a profound consequence for their long-term future, particularly in terms of the superannuation contributions that they have not been able to make as a consequence of having to spend that amount of time raising their kids and in the roles that they take on.

I am very pleased that a very well-attuned Labor Party forming government in this place, driven particularly by very energetic and determined women, has very much brought this policy reform to this Parliament. I am very much looking forward to this reform program being legislated through this chamber and the Legislative Council over the next couple of sitting weeks. I am looking forward to us engaging with the federal government to further implement this reform program because I think it is critically important to our community and to our society. For those that consider themselves economists, this will of course, I am sure, tickle their fancy. It will very much lead to productivity gains for our nation. It will see those young people provided with a quality of education that otherwise they would not have received, meaning that our country and indeed our state will be able to compete on a global stage in a far stronger way than what we would have been able to do otherwise. That provides a very clear tangible outcome for our state and indeed for our country.

As I was saying a little earlier, I had the opportunity of participating: doing the drop-offs with my kids at kinder and spending some of my time with them when they were at that age. I would very much like to see more men taking an active role in this part of the journey of fatherhood. I think we are seeing more men participating, which is a good thing, and I hope that into the future it becomes a more normal practice for that to happen. That is a good thing as well for those children. I also think, when I reflect on my seat, of all those thousands of families that are making their way to the southern growth corridor of Geelong. I have no doubt we will need to see more kinders, more childcare centres and more women given that opportunity to become early childhood educators. Certainly down in my part of the world the majority of those in that industry are women, and I commend them for their work.

Ms CRUGNALE (Bass) (18:15): I too rise to speak on the Early Childhood Legislation Amendment Bill 2022. There have been some really great, insightful contributions thus far. I too call on the federal government, as I am sure it will, being Labor and all, to join our progressive state in doing a lot more in the early childhood and pre-prep space. The character of a government is never more important than when it is caring about people who do not vote or cannot vote, making decisions for those who are vulnerable and who have no right of reply. Think of the most vulnerable person you know and vote in their best interests. Our children cannot vote, and it is our responsibility to do everything we can to protect them. That is why this legislation is so important. This legislation in part addresses issues identified in the national quality framework review. Extensive consultation with the sector nationally has led to these amendments, and if they are not passed in Victoria, services across the country will be affected. Time is tight. If this bill is not passed in Victoria this year, the implementation date of July 2023 will not be met despite national agreement from all education ministers.

There is nothing controversial, as we have heard in previous contributions, in this legislation. Safety measures in family day care are paramount. Who could dispute that we need to do everything we can to keep our youngest Victorians safe? Surely no-one would argue against requiring family day care coordinators to complete child protection training before commencing employment and to undertake an annual refresher course. It is our responsibility as a government to ensure that when a parent leaves their child at day care and walks out that front gate we have done everything we can to keep the child safe. Although Victoria recorded the second-lowest rate of serious incidents in 2020–21, we know that any serious incident is one too many, and this bill addresses gaps between the national principles for child safe organisations and the national law to require that all family day care coordinators complete that child protection training prior to commencing employment. My little ones went through family day care in Brunswick actually, many, many, many years ago—not quite last century but almost.

A very sensible inclusion in this bill is the extension of duration of the highest rating for an education and care service from three to five years. While services are always striving to achieve recognition, we know how much work goes into qualifying for an excellent rating, and extending the validity period

acknowledges this. As of June just this year 90 per cent of Victorian services with a quality rating received an overall rating of ‘meeting national quality standard’ or above. Five Victorian services have been rated as excellent and 28 per cent of services have an ‘exceeding national quality standard’ rating. There are currently no services with the lowest rating of ‘significant improvement required’.

I am also proud of our government’s commitment to early childhood, the most precious years, with unprecedented investments across the state this year. We are investing \$5 billion into funding universal three-year-old kinder, expanding access to 15 hours of kinder every week and including \$1.68 billion for infrastructure—and of course building the workforce of educators and teachers to support all the work that we are doing in this space as well. There is a further \$9 billion to make three- and four-year-old kindergarten free in participating centres from 2023—

A member interjected.

Ms CRUGNALE: I know, it is amazing—the Best Start, Best Life program, early childhood education that works—building 50 government-run, low-fee childcare centres in areas of greatest demand, and many of them are being built alongside schools. The benefits are obvious for parents and children: a seamless transition from preschool to primary school with their friends alongside, ensuring connections from a young age and reducing the stress that change can bring at an early age as well, and staying in the community with familiar faces. What is great also is that in a lot of our kinders they are learning the same languages as their neighbouring primary schools. Pearcedale preschool is an example. I was there recently with the Minister for Early Childhood and Pre-Prep, Minister Stitt. They are doing Auslan, and Pearcedale Primary School, the school just across the road and down a bit, has a really amazing deaf program and everyone is learning Auslan there as well.

Talking about connections further, I would like to also take this opportunity to give a shout-out to the San Remo Preschool, which the Minister for Early Childhood and Pre-Prep and I visited last week. We were welcomed by committee of management president Nikole Schellekens and super fabulous members of the committee and educators and teachers extraordinaire. All of them are so dedicated, professional, inspiring and amazing, and they are thrilled about the Best Start, Best Life initiative that our government has invested in. And they, through our investment, are going from 5 to 15 hours next year. So a big thanks to committee members Kim, Tayla, Melissa and Jodie and educators Bethanie, Nadine, Belinda, Corinne, Emma, Annette and Amy.

As I mentioned, we also visited the Pearcedale kinder, and we were met there by Virginia Lloyd, who is the manager of child, youth and family, City of Casey; the team leader, Jenna; Melanie; and also the early childhood teachers and educators, Rebecca, Yasuko and Julie. That was great. It was Book Week and everyone was dressed up as superheroes. The minister said to one of the little ones that she had a sore arm, so she was taken off to the Pearcedale little hospital in the corner and was told to put her mask on again; she was suitably bandaged up and was feeling much better after a session with the three-year-old medical doctor.

I would like to acknowledge also the wonderful Drysdale Street Kindergarten. It is an existing kindergarten that is co-located with Wonthaggi Primary School. It is undergoing a much-needed expansion, and that will offer 50 approved places when the expansion is completed in 2023. The Labor government funded an additional 33-place kinder room as well as administrative facilities and outdoor play areas so the children can engage in nature, stay active, have that agency as well and build their self-confidence and enjoy high-quality learning environments. It is a great example of why we co-locate childcare centres and kinders with primary schools. It certainly makes the day a lot easier with pick-up and drop-off and all that.

We are also building a new kinder at Newhaven Primary School. This two-room centre will provide 66 kinder places. Like the member for Tarneit, I grew up in WA, and it was kindy for us, so I am getting used to saying ‘kinder’. But this kinder will open out to an outdoor learning and play space.

A member interjected.

Ms CRUGNALE: Yes, it was ‘kindy’ in WA. In fact, when I was there recently my Albany community kindergarten—kindy—was still there. It still looks the same, and I had fond memories as I walked past the kindy that I went to over 50 years ago—no, less than 50 years ago.

Special mention goes also to the Clyde township family and community centre. That is due to open in 2023 in partnership with the City of Casey, which will provide essential services, including kindergarten and maternal and child health, as well as multipurpose community spaces. Ninety per cent of brain development occurs before the age of five, and we know the value of early education and transitioning to four-year-old play-based pre-prep to giving our youngsters the best start that they can have. From my larger communities of Pakenham and Wonthaggi to my smaller towns around Lang Lang and surrounds, our kids will have the very best start to their education.

Let me just make sure to put on the record that from next year, because of the commitment from the Labor government, all families with three- and/or four-year-olds—because many of the families have three- and four-year-olds—will pay nothing for kinder, which is a saving of up to \$2500 for every year. And I tell you what, that is resonating remarkably in the electorate of Bass. As was also mentioned before, when we look at it in the economic sense, there are 26 000 to 28 000 women that will have a choice to go back to work, and that has got a huge economic benefit as well. That is another cost-of-living program being delivered by the Andrews Labor government. I tell you what, the grandparents are pretty happy about this one as well, because they know about the cost of living for their kids and their families.

Even last month we announced a \$1 million expansion of the early childhood initiatives program, and the Department of Education and Training has engaged a panel of five recruitment agencies to support services to fill vacancies across Victoria in 2022–23. I am literally running out of time. I totally commend the bill to the house. I love kindy.

Mr BRAYNE (Nepean) (18:25): I also rise today to speak on the Early Childhood Legislation Amendment Bill 2022. Obviously the Victorian government is committed to strengthening the safety of children in early childhood services and improving the sector overall. In fact this is probably one of the most important things a state government can and should do. This bill will help improve the overall compliance and oversight tools necessary for the regulating authority in Victoria to effectively carry out its duties. Amendments included in this bill will lead to significant improvements in practices, qualifications and the overall awareness of the quality of services. Simply, the bill will effectively implement the outcomes of the review of the national quality framework and enable child safe standards to be enforced in the sector.

One way it will do this is by better enabling the regulator to do its job more effectively. Working to improve the early childhood sector is something this government takes very seriously. The Andrews government has prioritised, really in an unprecedented way, support for early childhood education. We have set aside \$5 billion to fund universal three-year-old kinder right across the state, an enormous achievement that will radically transform the lives of hundreds of thousands of families across Victoria and many in my community of Nepean. We are also building 50 government-run low-fee childcare centres in high-growth areas where the demand is also unprecedented. A lot of these centres are being built next to government schools so that parents do not have to worry about travelling across their local suburb or township to do the school drop-off and pick-up. Additionally, these reforms will help create more than 11 000 new jobs in the early childhood sector—a big win for teachers and educators and families right across our state.

So how did we get here and why are these changes happening now? Firstly, it is a national framework and amendments required by Victoria need to go through the Parliament in the form of this bill. All state and territory education ministers agreed on the changes recommended by the national quality framework review and that they must commence next year. This bill is what Victoria must do to implement its end of what was agreed to in the framework. Enforcement of the new child safe standards is indeed more urgent, and the regime for enforcing compliance with this will commence on

1 January next year. The bill will put in place necessary powers for the regulator, as I have mentioned, to enhance the sector's commitments to child safe standards and regulations.

With that in mind it is also important to note that consultation on this bill has been exemplary. The sector is supportive of the bill. Feedback from stakeholders who partook in the national quality framework review is that they understand the intentions of the bill and support those efforts to improve the health, safety and wellbeing of children in the sector. National stakeholder engagement and feedback was conducted back in 2019 all the way through to 2021. The Commission for Children and Young People was consulted over the changes to the child safe standards provisions for enforcement, while stakeholders in the child safe standards sector were strongly supportive of the desire to integrate regulations and reduce red tape.

My community has benefited enormously over these past few years, with significant investments made to childcare centres and preschools across my electorate of Nepean, including almost \$160 000 for Sorrento Preschool under the inclusive kindergartens facilities program and \$25 000 towards Dromana Pre-School's expansion of their main room and new entrance area. These come on top of the main investments this government has made across the board in school readiness grants and the Building Blocks program, which have also enormously benefited childcare centres in my community in Capel Sound and Rye.

There are many elements of being a local member of Parliament that I enjoy, particularly being a local member for an area where I have always been local, and getting to know the childcare centres in my community of Nepean has been a real privilege. Growing up on the peninsula I got to spend my own childhood at Balnarring Pre-School. My times there were great—really outdoorsy. I still remember my kindergarten teachers, Christine and Cherie, and I am sure many kids there today are receiving the same great care, teachings and experiences that I had. Visiting other kinders on the southern peninsula has also really been a treat. Whether it has been for a book read, a chat with the kids, a chat with the staff or one of my Easter egg hunts, the visits to kinders have really been among the highlights as I look back over the last four years.

Dromana Preschool is always so welcoming when I visit. I recall my first visit there was to do the official opening of its new upgraded building. I got the chance to read a book called *Piranhas Don't Eat Bananas*, which was evidently a favourite among the room. I quickly learned that children at that age were very engaged with stories that are really silly. Who would have guessed? On my last visit to Dromana Preschool, where I held my Easter egg hunt this year, I observed the kids playing 'Melbourne Train'. This was a game I was unfamiliar with, but it soon became clear to me that the kids walked around in a circle to a song. The music would stop when the announcer said things like 'Now arriving at Dandenong station; now arriving at Frankston station'. I told the educators I thought this was a great idea for a song, but they needed to make sure the kids were aware of all the level crossing works that were taking place on those lines. Incorporate those into the song somehow. I do not know how, but incorporate those ones in.

At Rye Preschool I am always warmly welcomed every time I visit by Julie. Julie is someone I have become good friends with during my time in this role as the member for Nepean. Rye has been a welcoming place since 2018. I have been there for many book reads, Easter egg hunts and playground conversations with the little kids over the past couple of years.

The other preschool that I have been fortunate to spend a lot of time at is Waterfall Gully. Tamar is a stalwart for the Rosebud and Waterfall Gully community. Her preschool provides families with a wonderful atmosphere and support, which sees families work really hard to try and get their child into her preschool. I have had many wonderful experiences at Waterfall Gully Preschool and commend all the teachers there and Tamar on their incredibly hard work.

There is of course so much more to do. Preschools like Tootgarook need assistance to plan for the future, to be supported to continue their hard work. I have spoken to Deb at Toot preschool multiple

times. We continue to push for their preschool to have a visit from council to set in motion a plan for its future. Finally on the local preschools, a shout-out to Kerry for her long service at Flinders Preschool. Kerry is a friend through her son—because as we know on the peninsula, everyone knows someone who knows someone. Kerry retired just before the pandemic, which was probably good timing, but before her retirement we did a book read there. I wish Kerry all the best with her retirement.

Investments must continue to be made in child care and the early childhood education sector to ensure we are giving kids the best possible start in life. Your postcode should not determine the quality of your early childhood education, not in Victoria. We are getting on with these reforms and investments because Victorian families deserve the very best. As I said just before, I am working hard with Tootgarook Preschool to get better facilities and support for their small but tight-knit community. I visited their site on a number of occasions and met with staff to hear their concerns. I will be continuing to work with the local council to urge them to make their facility a priority for an upgrade, and I will keep working with the state government on any support that we can give them.

These preschools and childcare centres that I have gotten to know so well will benefit from these amendments, along with the families that utilise them. With many families moving down to the Mornington Peninsula, facilities like these need to thrive. I am proud to say that these amendments do just that. The proposed amendments are reasonable and should be supported in this place. I want to focus on a handful of them now so the house understands their importance. Amendments around family day care are critically important. This is where regulation needs to be strengthened, with recommendations from the national quality framework review finding that this is a space with an over-representation of incidents and problems. Similarly, amendments within this bill will require family day care coordinators to complete child protection training prior to beginning their employment. On top of this they will also need to do annual training.

We will not hesitate in implementing reasonable and simple changes to better protect children in early childhood. Providing the regulator with improved capabilities to undertake its work is where the amendments in this bill will really deliver. Under these proposed changes the regulator will have improved and enhanced access to information about the way family day care providers operate, including details about the facilities they are working from, which will hopefully assist in emergencies. Additionally, providers and services will only need to deal with the existing regulator, reducing red tape and ensuring they can focus on better compliance with child safe standards.

Protecting children from harm and abuse must be embedded within the practices, ethos and protocols of family day care practices. That is what these amendments enable us to do. The amendments I have outlined are practical, sensible, substantial reforms across the early childhood sector. They must be supported by everyone in this place. They should be supporting efforts to critically strengthen the regulations and safety measures across children's services. Furthermore, these amendments have been drafted, as I said, following a significant period of consultation with stakeholders across the sector. This bill seeks to ensure greater protections of children in early childhood services. It strengthens the safety and oversight regulations of the sector and improves the Victorian regulation authority in this space. It is critical this bill passes the Parliament in order for these provisions to be rolled out from 1 January next year. It is with great pride that I commend this bill to the house.

Ms SULEYMAN (St Albans) (18:35): Each and every day since being elected the Andrews Labor government has continued to build an education system that makes sure that no student or child is left behind. This government continues to invest in the education sector, from making kinder free to investing in our primary schools, transforming VCE and most recently our announcement to pay the HECS for students enrolling in nursing and midwifery at university. Each of these investments is transformative for our state and makes further commitments to making sure that education is integral in Victoria. We are building strong foundations for future generations and making sure that our state has the skills and the talents it needs to continue to thrive now and into the future.

Every child, as I said earlier on, deserves the best start regardless of the postcode that they live in and every chance to begin their first steps in early childhood. We know that the early years of children's lives are the most important for their learning and for their development in the coming years. The early years are the foundation for lifelong learning and experiences, when children develop skills and confidence through interactions with other children, playing games and through programs and supports from their teachers and making kinder free from 2023. I know in my electorate of St Albans this has been a significant burden and a significant financial stress for families. With the cost of living, the increases each and every day and the pressures, whether it is household bills or the stress of rents, mortgages and so on, we know that free kinder and easing the pressure for families is very important to us. So policies that this government has created will change and ease cost-of-living pressures, on the other side of course meaning that more kids will get the best start for the best life and more parents will be able to get back into the workforce, boosting productivity within the Victorian economy. So it is good for the local economy, but it is a statewide boost as well.

We know that kinder should be an exciting time, and one of the best parts of my job, I find, is when I visit kindergartens and see childcare centres and in particular our investment—a close to \$9 billion investment—easing the burden on families and creating fantastic new facilities. It also creates job opportunities, and we have seen already 11 000 jobs for early childhood educators. We will also help to make the transition from kinder to school easier, because we know that there needs to be a rollout of pre-prep programs across the state. This will occur by 2032. In the initial stages of a child's life it is always a big step for children from kindergarten to actually transition to prep. So this is a fantastic initiative that we have put forward to our communities, and I have received nothing but welcoming and congratulations in relation to this initiative on its own.

We know that these reforms are much needed, because we know our local communities are supportive of these reforms, and it is part of making sure that our kids can continue to grow and really strive for those opportunities. So strengthening the regulations is absolutely important, and we know that our early childhood educators work very hard to make kinder a safe and caring place for all kids. They go beyond their jobs each and every day in supporting families and children. The amendments in this bill will provide an extra safeguard for kids in these spaces.

Also, all family day care coordinators will now need to complete child protection training and undertake a refresher course each year, and that is really important to make sure that they are up to date with new regulations or new initiatives that appear each year. It will also make it easier for regulators to work much more collaboratively with others in the sector to monitor and enforce compliance with child safe standards. We know how important that is, and there is nothing more important than the safety of our children.

As I said, one of the most important bits of my job is to visit childcare centres, and I had the pleasure of joining the Minister for Early Childhood and Pre-Prep in the other place to visit some of the centres that we have made significant investment in across St Albans, and that included, just last month, Phoenix Street childcare centre in Sunshine North, making sure that that particular precinct becomes not only a childcare centre but also a children's and community centre which incorporates a childcare centre, so a one-stop shop. This is not something that is not familiar for St Albans. We have invested in Ardeer kindergarten, a brand new building next door to Ardeer Primary School, again with the concept of one stop for parents to be able to drop off their kids at kinder or a childcare centre and also next door to a primary school. That is really important. That saves the traffic and saves the travel time for families. I want to thank the educators at Ardeer kindergarten for their fantastic programs. I really had much joy in visiting their centre a couple of months ago. All this is part of the government's Building Blocks grant program. I must commend the minister for early childhood in the other place for her contribution and commitment to early childhood education in Victoria. This is truly a historic moment where we see early childhood at the centre of education and development in this state.

As I said, we have not stopped investing for a moment since being elected. Whether it be in our centres, whether it be in our schools or whether it be in our educators, we have made many, many investments

and funding opportunities. I want to thank in particular Narmada, Nireen, Lina, Sohaila and Fatimo, who I had the opportunity to meet at Phoenix Street childcare centre just recently, but also all our early childhood sector workers across St Albans, including from Acacia childcare centre, which is just across the road from my electorate office. They do a fantastic job each and every day in supporting and really developing our youngest in our communities and the most important in our communities, who are our children.

I think these amendments in this bill, as I said, will clarify the requirements for educators and, most importantly, facilities across our communities and ensure the most effective means of promoting compliance and safer places and practices to improve their service delivery. As I mentioned, we have seen massive investment across this sector, particularly in my electorate of St Albans, and we continue to develop programs that address early childhood development. It is so important that our kids have positive, supportive educators and, most importantly, facilities as well that promote and foster better learning outcomes in our community. We certainly have done that since we have been elected. We have seen in just about every education centre in St Albans—every school, primary school—an investment in and a commitment across the electorate of St Albans when it comes to facilities. That also includes our early childhood centres. Whether it be existing centres or whether it be new builds, we certainly have seen a massive boost in the electorate of St Albans. In conclusion— (*Time expired*)

Mr EDBROOKE (Frankston) (18:45): I am sure the member for St Albans commends the bill to the house.

Ms Suleyman: That's right.

Mr EDBROOKE: And over to Frankston. It is definitely my pleasure to rise and speak on the Early Childhood Legislation Amendment Bill 2022. I do this in the context that we have heard a lot about the early childhood sector in the last few hours, but this is part of what we term the 'Education State' for a lot of us, especially the former practising teachers amongst us. It is part of this government's landmark agenda, a visionary agenda and an agenda that leaves a huge legacy—not just from a government perspective, where we can say we have done this, and for schools, which can say they are part of it, but for a generation of children, from perinatal to 18, that have been through a school system that is constantly being upgraded. That school system starts from birth obviously, but we know that, as we have heard many members in the house talk about, brain development and physical development in the early years is quite amazing, until at least age five. That is where the most important learning happens, whether that be social or whether that be towards the curriculum. It means that if we can access children and point them in the right direction and activate that lifelong learning at that level, we are doing them a hell of a favour.

As part of that agenda, we have heard that we are making kindergarten programs free from 2023 and increasing access to early childhood and quality childhood education across Victoria. That means providing more choices to Victorian families, where they will save money as well. Instead of putting children in child care, they can actually put their children in kindergarten and access 15 hours free as well. That might well be in one of the 50 new government-run childcare centres that will be available in those childcare deserts that have been spoken about so many times. We are going to transition that kindergarten model into a pre-prep model, with 30 hours of learning by 2032, creating that high-quality universal program that we have been aspiring to. We have heard, again, a fair bit about that today, and we have heard about the rollout of that 15 hours of three-year-old kinder.

One of the things, as a former educator, that I would like to point out is that it is not all about the core educational part of this—that we are accessing children and engaging them at that age with the curriculum. It is also about the diagnostics and that early intervention, when we find that a child might be on the spectrum, they might have different abilities, their eyesight might not be 20/20, their hearing might not be great, they might have learning difficulties, they might be at risk at home or they might have physical or mental delays in their development. It is often in prep that these kinds of conditions are picked up. I know this firsthand. There are children that will be in primary school and that might

get to grade 1 or 2 before it is first diagnosed that they have an eyesight problem, because they have trouble reading when they are not sitting up the front. Sometimes it is very hard to diagnose a child with a mild hearing condition. That might not be picked up for a while as well.

Those learning difficulties, or even kids that learn differently, are often not picked up until those children learn in a curriculum context as well. Take what we are doing and put it in that frame. We will have children that will no doubt come to three-year-old kinder and four-year-old kinder, and whether it be run by the government in those 50, with the 15 hours, or the 30 hours at four-year-old kinder, pre-prep, they will be able to be—hopefully—diagnosed a lot earlier, because we will be challenging their intellect and we will pick up things like their ears, their eyes and differences in learning, and that is a really, really powerful tool. When you consider that most women with autism or who are on the spectrum are picked up so much later in life, often when they are adults, versus men—the cues that often come out are a lot more obvious in men or boys; in women it is often seen as nervousness or as being withdrawn—being able to have specialist educators who have done the training and know what to look for is key to this. That is something that we are already seeing in primary schools and we are already seeing in kinders, but having kids that sometimes would not get the chance to go to kinder come to three-year-old kinder, we are going to see a lot more diagnoses coming out of that, catching these issues earlier and being able to help children a lot earlier so that they do not experience the delay that they might have experienced. I mean, everyone in this chamber knows of a child that could not read in grade 6 and then in year 7 went to a different school and was diagnosed with something or was given a pair of glasses. I have even seen that in local schools in Frankston. The success of one particular student in a primary school in Frankston was attributed to the Glasses for Kids program that this government runs. Unfortunately that child has broken two sets of glasses already so we are looking for some more funding for those glasses, but the difference they made was astounding. It will happen at this level too.

Now to the nuts and bolts of the bill. We have heard a lot about the bill amending legislation arising from recommendations from the national quality framework review and other policy decisions. The NQF basically operates as a national law scheme, and the states are responsible for enacting that law as the host jurisdictions. That is in a schedule to the Education and Care Services National Law Act 2010 I believe. The bill also makes changes to the national law to give effect to the amendments by strengthening the safety of children in early childhood services and addressing gaps between the national principles for child safe organisations and NQF, and it requires that all family day care coordinators complete child protection training prior to commencing employment. This might seem to be something that is very basic, something that could be overlooked—and I think it has been overlooked nationally. You only have to go back in the memory banks, even for a year, to hear about children left in cars, children on roads, children unsupervised in registered childcare and family day care centres, so this is only a good thing. It provides oversight and compliance tools as well, which are all very important.

Another fantastic part of this bill are the amendments relating to the child safe standards. The standards obviously are there to drive cultural change. It is pretty obvious, but we should do anything we can do to ensure that children are safe and we do not have any of the accidents—or, if you will, incidents, which is probably a better term for them—happen. That means looking at the practice of leaders, of their teams and of their staff—how they do things—and constantly improving, along with that new set of child safe standards that were put in place from 1 July 2022.

Another fantastic part of this bill are the amendments to the act relating to the maternal and child health nursing services—a wonderful service. Everyone is talking about their children so why can't I? They always loved going to the maternal and child health service to see where their child was, in what percentile and whatnot. I am sure it became a bit of a competition for some of the people in kindergarten, but for those nurses—I think you need a special kind of person. Often they are the first line; they are at the coalface where they notice things about children that need to be acted upon or families that need to be acted upon too. The bill basically enables incorporation of the Maternal and

Child Health Service Guidelines 2019 into the regulations. That basically provides the integrated framework and approach to service delivery in Victoria and outlines the qualification and registration requirements for maternal and child health nurses.

Just on that, I will finish up with the amazing announcement on Sunday that the government will effectively pay for people to do a nursing course. I have got an 18-year-old, and all of a sudden she is looking at nursing. She was looking at becoming a paramedic, but she comes from good nursing stock. Her grandmother and grandfather were both nurses. They rang her up and said, 'You should definitely look into this'. It was the first time in my house we had a political conversation about something the Andrews government was doing that I did not bring up, but my 17-year-old daughter brought it up with me, saying, 'How do I get on the list? How do I do it?'. So I hope to see another generation of nurses who will be specialised in that maternal and child health sense as well, and I very much commend this bill to the house.

Mr TAK (Clarinda) (18:55): It gives me great pleasure to join the member for Frankston and previous speakers to speak on the Early Childhood Legislation Amendment Bill 2022 and, most importantly, to have had the opportunity to listen to the member for Frankston, especially for his insights as a former educator. I also realise that in this house in 2018 we had a few educators join.

It has been such an exciting year for early childhood education in Victoria and for our youngest Victorians and their families. Talking about families, I also like to think of my family as one of those families with young children—eight, six and nearly two years old, Sofia—who will no doubt have the benefit and experience throughout their childhood life, through prep and also high school. It was such a proud moment—the announcement from the Andrews Labor government that kindergarten will be free for three- and four-year-old children. Free kinder will save families money and help Victorian children get the best start in life, and as we have already heard from previous contributors here, that is such a wonderful thing. Free kinder for three-year-olds means 5 to 15 hours per week of kinder programs, and four-year-olds will transition from four-year-old kinder to pre-prep, with 30 hours of learning by 2032, creating a high-quality, universal program to give four-year-old kids opportunities to learn through play. It is truly amazing. It is an amazing investment in our youngest Victorians and one that I am so proud of.

I am so extremely proud of this government's investment in our early learning centres in Clarinda and in the south-east. If I may just say, there is a \$2 million investment, through the Building Blocks capacity-building stream grant, in Dingley Village in the electorate of Clarinda to increase kindergarten places. Through this we have created more than 300 new three- and four-year-old kindergarten places, helping families in Dingley Village get their kids into early childhood learning, which is a huge boost to our local community. The project itself is amazing and will provide three early childhood education and care rooms and supported and community-operated playgroups. It includes two 33-place kindergarten rooms and one 24-place occasional care room; maternal and child health, immunisation sessions and new parents groups; the Dingley Village Neighbourhood Centre; a reception area, administration offices, collaborative planning spaces and meeting rooms; and, most importantly, flexible community meeting spaces to facilitate the delivery of allied health and family support services. As I said, this is a huge boost to our community, and I know that this funding is well received by my community in Dingley Village.

I thank the Kingston council for their collaboration on the project. The development will be co-located with the existing Kingston council library. The Dingley centre itself is one of the six centres to share almost \$10 million, getting more kids into kindergarten and ensuring that they will get the best start—*(Time expired)*

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! I am required under sessional orders to interrupt business now. The member may continue their speech when the matter is next before the house.

Business interrupted under sessional orders.

Adjournment

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The question is:

That the house now adjourns.

RIPON ELECTORATE ROADS

Ms STALEY (Ripon) (19:00): (6506) My adjournment tonight is to the Minister for Roads and Road Safety, and the action I seek is the widening and resealing of three VicRoads C-class roads in my electorate of Ripon. The three roads that I am particularly talking about tonight are St Arnaud-Wycheproof Road, Donald-Stawell Road and Stawell-Avoca Road.

Mr Carbines interjected.

Ms STALEY: It is one project, thank you, minister at the table, the Minister for Police, who wants to once again downplay the needs of my electorate. The Wimmera Southern Mallee Regional Transport Group has identified these and many others as priority projects, and the specific thing that I am asking tonight is this: these are C-class roads, they are VicRoads roads and in some parts they are only one lane wide on the bitumen; what they need to be is two lanes wide, and they need to have a proper shoulder on them, also bitumen. These are roads that carry a lot of B-double traffic and, increasingly, A-double traffic. They are in the middle of the grain belt in most cases, and so they really are carrying some big trucks now—more so, could I say, because the government has failed to complete the Murray Basin rail project. As a result, all of the benefits that would have come from that project—which is to take trucks off the road—being done properly have not eventuated. Therefore we have got these three roads—and like I said, there are many others in the Wimmera Southern Mallee Regional Transport Group's priority projects, but these are the three that are mainly in my electorate of Ripon—and they just need to be fixed.

There is a really deep need to improve safety in my electorate for all drivers, but also it increases productivity. If the government will not fix the rail system and will not take the grain off the roads, then they have to fix the roads and make them fit for purpose. These roads are not fit for purpose. In many places they are not much more than one lane wide. They are the kind of country roads that you sort of expect that you all go out to the side on—and we do that on a lot of council roads, and we sort of put up with it. But these are VicRoads roads, carrying large amounts of freight, freight that this government is very quick to talk about with its export performance. Well, it is my electorate and the member for South-West Coast's electorate that are delivering that export performance, but they are being stymied at every point because the roads are so atrocious—utterly atrocious. So the action I seek is simply that the government gets out and turns these three roads into roads that are fit for purpose.

ASHWOOD HIGH SCHOOL BUS SERVICES

Mr FOWLES (Burwood) (19:03): (6507) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Public Transport—what a great minister he is too—and the action I seek is for the minister to join me and my colleague the member for Mount Waverley at Ashwood High School to meet with students and other members of the school community regarding safe, convenient, affordable and efficient transport options to and from school. Ashwood High School is a leading government secondary school, one that I take great pride in representing in this place. This school has always provided its students with exceptional teachers and is a school community that really looks after one another. Ashwood High wants to provide all their students with the best opportunities, and the results speak for themselves.

I would like to bring to your attention the fantastic year 12 efforts of this school. In 2021 the school ranked as a top-10 public school in Victoria, which is a credit to the principal, Dr Brett Moore, the staff and the entire school community. Early this year we were approached by students who are concerned about capacity constraints on the bus that takes students to Oakleigh station via Huntingdale Road after school. The safety of these students is of utmost importance to us because this is the education state and this Labor government believes that every child deserves safe and reliable access

to a high-quality education. This government does not just talk the talk when it comes to ambitious public transport reforms, we walk the walk, and we do so with our community behind us. Last Tuesday the member for Mount Waverley and I met with the Ashwood High School student representative council and Principal Moore to listen to their concerns and suggestions, providing us with a stronger understanding of this issue. It is schools like Ashwood High that make me proud to be a part of this Andrews Labor government.

This government knows that these young people are our future, and that is why we are investing to make sure our future is brighter than ever. This potential bus service upgrade forms part of a broader suite of investments in the school. We have committed almost \$9.742 million for a new senior STEM and research centre, with work already underway. This comes on top of the \$500 000 in funding delivered by the Andrews Labor government as part of the infrastructure planning and acceleration fund, which allowed the school to plan for new and upgraded facilities. But that is not all. Ashwood High School was also successful in their application for the School Shade Sails Fund, a highly competitive grant program which saw more than 1800 schools apply. This funding created extra outdoor learning spaces as well as a place for the students to slip, slop, slap, seek and slide. I look forward to the minister's response.

SANDRINGHAM ELECTORATE SCHOOLS

Mr ROWSWELL (Sandringham) (19:06): (6508) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Education, and the action that I seek is for the Andrews Labor government to immediately and urgently assure the Beaumaris Secondary College community that the originally planned stage 2 developments, which include double-court extensions to the games hall gymnasium, will be fully implemented at that school. I visited Beaumaris Secondary College and met with the principal, Debby Chaves, and school council president, Steve Pearce, in May this year to discuss the fact that the government has at this point failed to fulfil its promised stage 2 development in its entirety and has apparently abandoned its commitment to double the capacity of the gymnasium as part of the stage 2 and final development. In June, upon the new education minister's appointment, I wrote to her requesting urgent consideration of this matter. We are nearing September and the minister is yet to respond to my request seeking an immediate assurance that the double-court extension will be completed as forecast in the school's master plan.

This extension is significantly important to the Beaumaris Secondary College community but also has a range of other benefits to the wider Bayside community. The current space in the gymnasium has a capacity of 800. The co-educational college currently has an enrolment of 841 in years 7 to 11 and is projected to have a student population of over 1000 next year with the expansion of the year 12 cohort. The school will not be able to meet for a whole-school assembly nor any other college event from next year onwards. There are also more than 50 sport and health lifestyle classes that run in the gymnasium per week, as well as many sport enhancement programs for hundreds of students. The expanded gymnasium will provide the school with the ability to host inter-school fixtures as well. The gymnasium is also used by local sporting and recreational clubs in the evenings until 9.00 pm and on weekends, and this extension would meet growing community demands as well as provide an important sustainable revenue stream for the school. The solution to this problem would simply be for the minister to fulfil the government's initial commitment of \$19 million for the stage 2 development. In this year's state budget the promised \$19 million was decreased by \$4.5 million.

My advocacy for better educational infrastructure in my community also extends to the redevelopment of Mentone Girls Secondary College, funding for stage 2 of the Sandringham College redevelopment and gymnasiums for both Beaumaris and Beaumaris North primary schools. I humbly suggest to the minister that the remaining \$4.5 million already announced by the government and initially budgeted be used to deliver the much-needed and anticipated double-court extension to the games hall gymnasium at Beaumaris Secondary College.

CASEY COMMUNITY HUBS

Mr MAAS (Narre Warren South) (19:08): (6509) The matter I wish to raise is for the attention of the Minister for Multicultural Affairs and concerns support for Casey community hubs. The action I seek is that the minister provide any information on state government support for the Casey community hubs that serve my electorate of Narre Warren South. I recently had the pleasure of representing the minister at the official launch of the opening of the five Casey community hubs, and indeed I would like to thank Jana and the Smith Family as well as Community Hubs Australia for their warm welcome at the launch.

My electorate is very diverse. It is a really multicultural area, and these hubs support newly arrived migrants. The hubs are part of our assistance for our CALD communities and are integral to connecting people in need of support to education, social networks and essential services. Our CALD members make a wonderful contribution not only to Narre Warren South but to our state. These Casey hubs will work alongside the national community hubs program and especially help migrant women and young children. We see the positive impacts these places have on countless families each day. I really enjoyed hearing the stories of hub members and how hubs have assisted them in their new communities. I know that these hubs are needed, and they are a leading model of support for my constituents. I would appreciate it if the minister could provide any further information on how the state government is assisting the rollout of community hubs and providing support for the CALD members in my electorate, and I look forward to sharing the minister's response with my community.

SOUTH GIPPSLAND HIGHWAY

Mr D O'BRIEN (Gippsland South) (19:10): (6510) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety, and the action I seek is for the minister to provide funding and works from VicRoads or Regional Roads Victoria to improve the South Gippsland Highway between Foster and Yarram. Specifically what I am after is an overtaking lane between Foster and Toora, which land was purchased for in this particular location around 20 years ago by what was then called VicRoads, and yet nothing has ever occurred. You can still drive just out of Toora—on the western side of Toora—and you will see the long narrow stretch of land fenced off for an overtaking lane that never happened.

The history of this goes back to the current works on the South Gippsland Highway at the Black Spur bends, which is a great project that I fought for for years and years and the community had been after for a long time. It was my federal colleague Darren Chester who provided the funding at that time, as the federal minister for infrastructure, which was ultimately matched by the then Victorian roads minister, and the \$50 million project was to proceed. It has ended up being \$115 million—consistent with most blowouts under this government—but that project is almost complete, and we now need to move towards the next stage of improvements on the South Gippsland Highway.

There are a number of overtaking lanes between Nyora and Foster, but there is nothing from Foster onwards to Yarram. It is quite a distance to travel and, as I said, the purchase has been made of the roadside there to put in an overtaking lane. There are no further overtaking lanes between Toora and Yarram, but they are largely stretches of straight roads, and there are some good opportunities for overtaking. This is an area, though, that is located adjacent to the Prom and on the alternate route from Melbourne to Sydney that many tourists with caravans and boats and others go along on the South Gippy highway. I mentioned that Black Spur section because originally the federal government contribution was suggested to be predominantly—I think it was \$25 million from each government, with \$20 million each to go to the Black Spur realignment and a further \$10 million for improvements between Meeniyan and Yarram, and that did not occur because that project blew out quite substantially.

The community would like to see more overtaking lanes and more improvements to the road surface itself between Foster and Yarram, and I encourage the minister to provide funding not only for that but particularly for the overtaking lane just out of Toora to make the South Gippsland Highway a much more attractive place and to make it more attractive for our tourists, our locals and our freight movements and to improve the road more generally, as it is in dire need at the moment.

RIPON ELECTORATE

Ms GREEN (Yan Yean) (19:13): (6511) My adjournment matter is for the attention of the Minister for Housing, Minister for Government Services, Assistant Treasurer and Minister for Regulatory Reform, and the action I seek is for him to visit the Ripon electorate to observe firsthand the myriad of economic opportunities that exist across its great communities.

In Dunolly the community there has a fantastic proposal for social housing to be co-located with the Dunolly hospital, where my late father was born as well as four of his brothers. We know that it was a Liberal government in the 1990s that tried to close that hospital. The community fought that action and won, and they are still an active community looking out for each other and coming up with ideas.

In St Arnaud a late, great mayor of Northern Grampians, Cr Tony Driscoll, told me and Labor's candidate for Ripon, Martha Haylett, that he believed the old campus of St Arnaud High would make a perfect and central location for affordable housing. He was worried that a number of local businesses were operating at only 60 per cent capacity because there is not enough key worker housing in the town. It would be a fantastic thing to look at this issue in his memory.

In Maryborough the upgrade of the magnificent Central Goldfields Art Gallery, funded by Regional Development Victoria, is nearing completion, and it will be a fantastic drawcard not only now but also when the Commonwealth Games visitors come in large numbers to our wonderful regions. In short, Minister, there are a myriad of economic opportunities across these brilliant—

Ms Staley: And you've announced none.

Ms GREEN: You wait, member for Ripon, there will be stuff announced.

Ms Staley: None yet. You can't deliver.

Ms GREEN: I can't keep up? Give me a break.

Ms Staley: No, you can't deliver.

Ms GREEN: I think you are seriously being outrun at the moment, sister. I look forward to joining the Labor candidate, Martha Haylett, for a fantastic visit with the minister to see what fantastic opportunities there are in the Ripon electorate.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Member for Yan Yean, just to clarify, which of the minister's portfolios was that question directed to?

Ms GREEN: Government services.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Government services, thank you.

MORWELL ELECTORATE EMPLOYMENT

Mr NORTHE (Morwell) (19:15): (6512) My adjournment matter is directed to the Treasurer. The action I seek from the Treasurer is for him to develop a plan for the Latrobe Valley that outlines how the government intends to reduce unemployment in the Morwell electorate whilst maintaining and growing services at the same time.

Last week the state government and the Treasurer noted that Victoria's regional unemployment rate had fallen to a record low of 2.9 per cent in July 2022. In spruiking these figures the Treasurer said Victoria's regional unemployment rate was by far the lowest regional unemployment rate in the nation according to ABS statistics. The media statement of last week went on to say that the unemployment rate was 2.5 per cent in the Latrobe-Gippsland region. In my time in Parliament I have come to realise that statistics, particularly unemployment statistics, can be massaged to overshadow the reality on the ground and the true unemployment challenges in local towns and communities, so let me outline what the reality is in my community using data released by the National Skills Commission in March 2022, *Small Area Labour Markets*, and associated information, which says the following: Latrobe city

currently has an unemployment rate of 5.1 per cent, with 2683 people unemployed; Traralgon unemployment sits at 5 per cent, with 726 people unemployed; in Moe-Newborough unemployment is 9.5 per cent, with 699 persons unemployed; Churchill's unemployment rate is 5.3 per cent, with 306 persons unemployed; and Morwell's unemployment rate is 15.3 per cent, with 863 people unemployed. Compared to the regional unemployment average these are concerning statistics.

From my perspective it is further troubling given the changes to our workforce and industry profile and the withdrawal of services and closure of businesses in some of our towns and the flow-on effects, directly and indirectly. The transition away from current power stations and native timber sectors is yet to be fully realised in our community. Unless there are thorough and proper supports and plans in place over the next few years my fear is these unemployment rates will rise further and place our people further into disadvantage. Transition, along with COVID-19 impacts and COVID rules, has and is still having a major impact. In Morwell we have seen the closure of restaurants, such as the Vault and Saltbush Restaurant & Cafe, and even social enterprise A Kinder Cup Cafe has closed, which ironically was located in the government's own GovHub. Morwell businesses and enterprise rely on public service employees being at work in Morwell, but the work-from-home rules have made life extraordinarily difficult. Like Morwell, Churchill has seen the withdrawal of multiple banking services and the closure of shops, even including Ritchies IGA supermarket and the Hazelwood House aged care facility. So we not only have the issue of unacceptably high employment rates in our towns, we have seen the withdrawal of crucial services. Our community needs confidence. We need a plan. Do not throw fudged unemployment statistics at us, give us a plan that talks about real jobs.

BAYSWATER ELECTORATE HEALTH SERVICES

Mr TAYLOR (Bayswater) (19:18): (6513) I am so incredibly thankful for and proud of the work our healthcare workers and staff in healthcare settings are doing locally and across the state. Day in, day out they continue to turn up and give people the care they need when they need it. I am also proud of the continued investment by the state Labor government to ensure we support our healthcare heroes and patients to get the best care. In the recent budget we delivered a \$12 billion boost to health care in Victoria, and even more recently we announced that we are making it free to study nursing and midwifery from 2023, helping to recruit and train 17 000 nurses and midwives on top of the work already announced. I wish to raise a matter for the Minister for Health: what does the \$12 billion investment in the budget for health care in Victoria and the other continued record health investments this Labor government delivers mean for Knox more specifically?

Across the state we know the investment in this year's budget will provide for better hospitals, more paramedics—with over 400 extra on the road this year alone—and better care wherever you are. It will also deliver 7000 more healthcare workers, of which 5000 are nurses and paramedics, and nearly 400 more 000 call takers. This investment also is not a new thing—Labor has always backed in health every step of the way, while others cut at every turn. We have recruited hundreds more paramedics and more than 22 000 health workers since we were elected, including 8500 who joined the workforce during the pandemic. We do not cut funding to health like we have seen from previous coalition governments, and we certainly did not attack the pay and conditions of paramedics like we saw years ago.

We know the impact of staff shortages from illness and COVID-19 is a substantial challenge, and we are doing everything we can to meet this unprecedented demand. All states' health and ambulance systems are under unprecedented pressure, and the Labor government and importantly our healthcare heroes are continuing to respond to those challenges. Recently we announced additional funding to assist with more efficient triage off-load processes for ambulances to hospitals and onwards. We are also getting on with delivering a \$1.5 billion COVID catch-up plan to increase elective surgery beyond pre-pandemic levels, new hospitals, more mental health nurses, more support for emergency departments to meet growing demand and more support for women's health, safety and wellbeing.

The Labor government has invested more than \$158 billion in Victoria's health system since coming to office, ensuring all Victorians have access to the care, treatment and support they need to stay happy,

healthy and well. Only Labor can be trusted to deliver a better health system, because only Labor ever has. Thank you so much again to our healthcare heroes across the state who, during unprecedented demand in the healthcare system, continue to do incredible work each and every day. You will always have my and this government's support.

V/LINE SERVICES

Ms BRITNELL (South-West Coast) (19:21): (6514) My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Public Transport, and the action I seek is for the government to ensure all V/Line services that run between Warrnambool and Melbourne are accessible to people with disabilities. On Monday a constituent of mine, Merrilyn Reid, was left stranded in Warrnambool due to a failure by V/Line to ensure there was appropriate wheelchair access to its service to Melbourne. Ms Reid booked on Saturday to travel on Monday morning's service to Melbourne but was told buses would replace trains for the journey.

Over the past couple of years buses have regularly been needed to replace trains for either sections of the service or the entire journey due to disruptions on the train line. However, not all V/Line coach services have a lift or allocated space for travellers with mobility aids, such as scooters or wheelchairs. When this happens taxis are used to transport affected travellers. On Monday no taxi was available to take Mrs Reid from Warrnambool to Geelong, where she would have been able to access a train to Melbourne. For some inexplicable reason V/Line did not organise a taxi on Saturday when Ms Reid booked to travel, despite surely knowing the coach service did not have the appropriate lifts in place.

This is not a one-off occurrence and is inexcusable. How can we have a situation in this day and age where people with disabilities are still being discriminated against? It is shameful. It is bad enough that this government needs to rely on taxis to transport people to Melbourne from Warrnambool at great expense, which makes them feel that they are being singled out for having a disability because our train or coach services do not have proper infrastructure in place to support those with disabilities, but for V/Line not even to ensure a taxi was available is appalling.

In 2017 South-West Coast was promised new VLocity trains to replace the current fleet as part of an upgrade to the Warrnambool line. This would allow for a fifth daily rail service between Warrnambool and Melbourne. Fast-forward to 2022, and we are still waiting. That is despite the fact that the Premier promised the first VLocity trains would be running within 12 to 18 months of that announcement in 2017. We have also now learned that the new VLocity trains will have less seats and no catering service and will not run any faster than the current fleet. For a long-haul service like the one from Warrnambool to Melbourne one would expect a catering service similar to what is currently offered. You can rest assured people from metropolitan Melbourne would not get such shoddy treatment from this government. Like usual, we suffer due to this city-centric government that just does not care about regional Victoria. We deserve the best rail service possible, one that delivers for everyone. That is why I implore the minister to ensure at the very least that V/Line offers disability access for all its services between Warrnambool and Melbourne.

HEALTHCARE WORKERS

Mr McGUIRE (Broadmeadows) (19:24): (6515) My request is to the Minister for Health. The action I seek is a report on how the state district of Broadmeadows will benefit from the landmark next generation of nurses and midwives scheme. The government is providing more opportunities for student nurses to enter the workforce and gain on-the-job experience. This is just one of the state government's initiatives to relieve pressure on our health system, and I note that the Premier of Victoria and the Premier of New South Wales made another announcement today on a creative way to cut hospital waiting lists. As part of the Victorian government's 2022–23 budget, the government invested \$59 million to create 1125 registered undergraduate student nurse positions per year for two years and almost \$10 million to create 75 registered undergraduate student midwife positions. The program has already seen 3000 students work in hospitals across Victoria, providing extra support to

more experienced nurses and midwives during this period of unprecedented demand and giving students critical practice experience to support their studies.

The Victorian government will deliver \$60 million for the new Broadmeadows Health Service and centre of excellence as the first stage of revitalising Kangan Institute's landmark campus in Broadmeadows and training local people for local jobs. This is critical. The centre of excellence will deliver courses in high-priority industries, including nursing, allied health, healthcare education services and disability, to help drive economic recovery and social development post the pandemic. It is time to get the investment back and also to return the identity that this proud, resilient community wants to see. The one-term coalition government, I want to remind the Parliament, transferred \$25 million from Kangan Institute in Broadmeadows to Bendigo. We want that money back and to have our identity back. It should be called Kangan Institute Broadmeadows. I want to emphasise that when the coalition did this it was in the middle of when we were going through deindustrialisation. Broadmeadows was the area that was hardest hit. Do not forget Tony Abbott's first budget: the lifters and leaners budget, he called it. Well, this was the area that was hardest hit. We lost manufacturing scale with the demise of our once proud automotive industry. Then the coalition government had to come back to Broadmeadows—the former Prime Minister, Scott Morrison, standing there at CSL in Broadmeadows, saying, 'We're going to make another announcement for vaccines: a \$1.8 billion deal'. This is where you go when you want to get the new industries—niche manufacturing that we need for independent supply chains and the national sovereignty that Australia craves.

RESPONSES

Mr CARBINES (Ivanhoe—Minister for Police, Minister for Crime Prevention, Minister for Racing) (19:27): There were several matters raised for ministers, including from the member for Ripon, who raised with the Minister for Roads and Road Safety that there be action to widen three VicRoads roads in her electorate.

The member for Burwood raised a matter for the Minister for Public Transport, asking that he join him and the member for Mount Waverley at Ashwood High School. The member for Sandringham raised a matter for the Minister for Education regarding Beaumaris Secondary College and action on the stage 2 program being fully implemented. The member for Narre Warren South raised a matter for the Minister for Multicultural Affairs, and the action was with regard to state government support for the Casey community hubs. The member for Gippsland South raised a matter for the Minister for Roads and Road Safety to provide funding to improve the South Gippsland Highway.

The member for Yan Yean raised a matter for the Minister for Government Services with regard to action to visit the Ripon electorate regarding several economic opportunities. The member for Morwell raised a matter for the Treasurer with regard to developing a plan for the Latrobe Valley, in the Morwell electorate, with regard to employment. The member for Bayswater raised a matter for the Minister for Health regarding what that multimillion-dollar health investment has been doing to deliver for the Knox area in his electorate.

The member for South-West Coast raised a matter for the Minister for Public Transport around action to do with the V/Line services between Melbourne and Warrnambool and making sure those services are accessible to all. The member for Broadmeadows raised a matter for the Minister for Health regarding action of reporting back on how Broadmeadows would benefit from the Andrews government's new multimillion-dollar recruitment policy for nurses and midwives.

I will make sure those matters are passed on to ministers for their urgent action and response.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The house stands adjourned until tomorrow.

House adjourned 7.30 pm.