

TRANSCRIPT

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL LEGAL AND SOCIAL ISSUES COMMITTEE

Inquiry into Victoria's Criminal Justice System

Melbourne—Friday, 5 November 2021

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Ms Harriet Shing

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Ms Sheena Watt

WITNESSES (*via videoconference*)

Ms Rebecca Falkingham, Secretary,

Dr Melanie Heenan, Executive Director, Victim Services, Support and Reform, and

Ms Larissa Strong, Acting Commissioner, Corrections Victoria, Department of Justice and Community Safety.

The CHAIR: Good morning, everyone. I would like to declare open the Legislative Council's Legal and Social Issues Committee's public hearing for the Inquiry into Victoria's Criminal Justice System.

May I start this hearing by acknowledging the Aboriginal peoples, the traditional custodians of the many and various lands that we are gathered on today. I am on Wurundjeri land of the Kulin nation and pay my respects to their ancestors, elders and family, and I particularly welcome any elders or community members who will be joining us as part of this hearing today or who are watching this hearing online. As we know and as we have learned as we have travelled through this inquiry, the impact on Aboriginal people of our justice system is exponentially larger than the rest of our community. I would also like to welcome any other members of the public who are joining us today for what will be a very interesting day of public hearings.

I am Fiona Patten, the Chair of the committee. I am joined by Dr Tien Kieu, the Deputy Chair; Ms Tania Maxwell; and Ms Kaushaliya Vaghela. They are our committee members.

Today we are delighted and very pleased to be joined for the first session by the Department of Justice and Community Safety. Here with us today we have Rebecca Falkingham, who is the Secretary of that department; Melanie Heenan, who is the Executive Director for Victim Services, Support and Reform; and Larissa Strong, who is Acting Commissioner of Corrections Victoria. Welcome. Thank you very much for making the time to join us today.

All evidence taken today is protected by parliamentary privilege, and that is under our *Constitution Act* but also the standing orders of the Legislative Council. Therefore any information that you provide during this hearing is protected by law. You are protected against any action for what you say here today. Of course if you were to go elsewhere and repeat the same things, you may not have the same protection. Any deliberately false evidence or misleading of the committee could be considered a contempt of Parliament.

As I am sure you are very used to and aware, Hansard is recording today's session. You will receive a transcript in the coming days. I would really encourage you to have a look at it to make sure that we did not mishear you or misrepresent what you have said today. Ultimately that transcript will form part of our report into the criminal justice system and it will also go up onto our website.

Rebecca, I understand that you have a presentation. If you would like to start with the presentation, then we will open it up for committee questions. Again, thank you for coming.

Visual presentation.

Ms FALKINGHAM: Thank you, Chair. I too would like to acknowledge the traditional owners of the land on which we are meeting today, the Wurundjeri people. I would also like to pay my respects to their elders past and present and Aboriginal elders of other communities who may be with us at today's hearing. It is really important to me as the head of the Department of Justice and Community Safety that we not only acknowledge traditional owners because it is protocol but because it reminds us in this department of the really important role we have to work with community to transform outcomes for our Aboriginal people. I would like to also acknowledge the members of the Legal and Social Issues Committee, and thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today. With me today are Larissa Strong, Acting Commissioner of Corrections Victoria, and Melanie Heenan, the Executive Director of Victim Services, Support and Reform, who play really key roles leading operations within the Department of Justice and Community Safety.

As the Secretary of the Department of Justice and Community Safety I really welcome this committee's inquiry and the forum it has given to members of the community to discuss the opportunities and challenges facing Victoria's criminal justice system. These conversations are critical to the wellbeing and safety of all Victorians, and any occasion to further strengthen the justice system is really welcomed by us in the department. The

Department of Justice and Community Safety has been a leader in developing and implementing substantive reforms across the justice system as well as playing a coordination and leadership role to bring the justice portfolio's independent partners together to achieve and deliver better policy and operational outcomes for justice system users and the community more broadly.

The department has led over the past few years a recognition of victims' rights within the criminal justice system. We know we have got much more work to do, but we have been focused on shifting the focus from an offender-centric approach to one that acknowledges the deep and longstanding impact crime and criminal justice processes have on victims and their families. In the last three years the Department of Justice and Community Safety have really intensified our efforts to address the key drivers of crime, reforming the way youth justice is delivered in the state—which I will talk about more later—developing a comprehensive *Crime Prevention Strategy* for local communities and taking needed action to address the continued over-representation of Aboriginal people in the justice system.

DJCS, you will see there in the slides, is an executive department of the Victorian government with a broad portfolio that includes criminal and civil law policy, corrections, youth justice, crime prevention, police policy, victim support, consumer protections, fines, workplace safety, gaming and liquor regulation, emergency management, dispute resolution and the integrity system. We obviously have five ministers across nine portfolios in the department, and in my capacity as Secretary I am responsible for overseeing the department and the administration of justice in Victoria, which aims to support the community and strive for a safer, fairer and stronger community.

Since taking up this role three years ago a central focus of our department's board of managers has been on the statement of direction that you will see there on the screen. It has been really important that we can work right across the system towards collective goals. This document sets out the strategic priorities and values that we want as a department. The department's mission is to create a safer and more resilient community where Victorians are protected from crime, contact with the justice system is minimised and justice services can support the health and wellbeing of everyone in the community.

Creating a trusted justice and community safety system is really critical, and we are very, very conscious of the impact the last few years have had in relation to the Royal Commission into the Management of Police Informants, in terms of that trust in the justice system. Our job is to ensure that we really restore that trust and integrity in our system. We also want to make sure that our institutions are valued by the community and make our community feel safer and most critically they support our victims of crime.

Improving easy access to justice and safety systems and services, ensuring they are both integrated and easy to navigate and are widely accessible to those who need them not just the people that work within them.

Creating a fair and accessible justice system for Aboriginal people and recognising the systemic harm that has been caused to communities through the over-representation in the justice system and that the pathway to positive change is rooted in self-determination. It was really important for me when I came into the department that we elevated the role of Aboriginal Justice to our board of management. We have a dedicated deputy secretary now that leads our work on Aboriginal Justice in partnership with the Aboriginal community. The committee will see that DJCS has also introduced reforms to build a foundation for further progress, ensuring a stronger and more sustainable justice system into the future.

As the committee has heard throughout the inquiry, the reasons or causes for people to become involved in the justice system are complex and multifaceted. A critical observation in the whole-of-government submission to this inquiry is that many of the contributing factors for offending and reoffending lie outside of the criminal justice system's reach, which it is why it is really critical that we as a department are working with all parts of government to keep people out of our system. Measures to reduce recidivism and prevent crime are inextricably linked to the availability of housing, education, employment, health, mental health and disability supports. These systems and services all have a role in preventing people from coming into contact with the justice system, and the challenge for us is to deliver integrated, holistic responses for all Victorians.

So better recognising the rights and interests of victims of crime and supporting their participation in criminal justice processes have been one of the big cultural shifts in the justice system. We know that keeping their voices and experiences central to the criminal justice system is critical to achieving better results for the

community. As part of the 2021–22 budget the department embarked on the biggest reform to victim support in more than 20 years, replacing the Victims of Crime Assistance Tribunal with a more accessible and trauma-informed financial assistance scheme. This money will also be used to establish a new victims legal service through Victoria Legal Aid and community legal centres and continue the really successful intermediary program, which provides specialist support during criminal legal proceedings so that vulnerable victims and witnesses can understand, participate and provide evidence with greater confidence.

In 2019 we engaged with the Centre for Innovative Justice at RMIT to conduct a review of victim services. The victim services review has provided us with advice on how to improve access to victim support services and mitigate long-term impacts of victimisation. It sets a really ambitious reform agenda. We never anticipated we would be able to do it in 12 months. This is a decade-long reform, one that we know that we are deeply committed to and want to actually make a difference for victims and their families. The department has already commenced addressing some of the recommendations and will continue to consider and implement those recommendations.

The DJCS Victims Support Agency is responsible for coordinating a whole-of-government response to services for victims of crime and is supported by the statewide victims assistance program to facilitate timely referrals. In addition to delivering critical victim services, the department has delivered a number of reforms to both empower victim-survivors and reduce the trauma that they can experience in criminal proceedings, including changes to the *Judicial Proceedings Reports Act* and the *Victims' Charter Act* and implementing recommendations from the Royal Commission into Family Violence.

We will not do anything in this department unless we are really clear that the victim's voice has been enshrined—be it legislation, be it policy development, be it budgets. It is really critical to us that the experience that victims have had in this state is continually improving our system. Creating specialist courts has been a top priority in that regard, providing greater security, comfort and choice for people experiencing family violence, while incorporating innovative approaches to managing perpetrator offending. The courts are staffed by experts, dedicated magistrates, operational staff and family violence practitioners who benefit from ongoing training to make sure they are well equipped to meet the needs of victim-survivors. Identifying further opportunities to improve the victim-survivors' experience continues to be a priority for this department, and several inquiries are currently investigating this issue.

In parallel, there is strengthening support for victims, since 2018 the department has delivered a range of measures to bolster community safety. It is by design that we have community safety in the title of our department. The department has delivered on reforms to better protect workers who protect the community, recognising the particular risks faced by emergency services workers and other frontline personnel. The laws protect emergency workers from attack and abuse and ensure that those who are found guilty receive a prison sentence, except in the most exceptional of circumstances. Priority work is progressing quickly to implement the recommendations of the Royal Commission into the Management of Police Informants, including 54 recommendations directed to government. All 10 of the commission's recommendations within a three-month implementation time frame have been delivered, and it is testament to the work right across the system that we were able to do that collaboratively.

Similarly, DJCS is helping to protect the most vulnerable in our community through our NDIS worker screening program, which we have integrated with our working with children scheme, and we are coordinating a widescale security upgrade to Melbourne's CBD, including the installation of physical barriers, upgrades to CCTV cameras and new public address systems. The upgrades will provide protection for pedestrians from vehicle-based attacks and improve how police can monitor and respond to other violent incidents.

In relation to responding to our Aboriginal communities, as I have mentioned, I am acutely aware of the criminal justice system's impact on Aboriginal communities and know we need to do more to address the over-representation of Aboriginal Victorians in all justice settings. In partnership with the Aboriginal communities through the Aboriginal Justice Forum and the Aboriginal justice agreement, work that we are really proud of and continue to improve upon every day, the department is continuing to address and reduce this over-representation. We affirm our commitment to self-determination and the need to respond to community concerns, especially where the justice system can do better. It is important to me and this department that we are exemplars of embracing self-determination and ensuring that there are Aboriginal voices at every decision-making table in our department. Building on decades of work and activism, including key recommendations

from the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody and the coronial inquest into the tragic death of Tanya Day, laws to decriminalise public drunkenness were passed this year to provide people who are intoxicated in public with health support, work that continues. Obviously we are moving towards trials of that work, so we will have more to say about that later this year.

Also passed this year was the *Spent Convictions Act* to reduce the lasting and damaging impact that old criminal records have on a person, such as limiting their ability to gain employment, secure housing or undertake volunteer work. Under the scheme, discrimination on the basis of a spent conviction will be unlawful, as you are all well aware having had it passed in Parliament. This will be an important headway in overcoming significant obstacles to self-determination currently posed by historical convictions on Aboriginal Victorians. The department also recognises that Aboriginal self-determination and closing the gap are intrinsically linked to country. Victoria is leading the way in empowering communities through negotiation and settlement agreements with traditional owners. These agreements create opportunities for traditional owners groups to partner with government agencies and other groups to create meaningful partnerships founded upon mutual respect.

If I can just touch briefly on diversion, prevention and early intervention. As the committee has heard, the causes of criminal offending are complex, and while community safety is a paramount priority for this government, we recognise that offending is often linked to causative factors, including health, education, housing and employment. The best outcome for individuals in the Victorian community is for people to avoid contact with the justice system entirely. This is why we committed to tackling the root causes of offending through early intervention. Earlier this year we launched a *Crime Prevention Strategy*, setting out a clear long-term approach for how government will work with Victorian communities, businesses and key organisations to intervene early and prevent crime before it occurs. The strategy will drive collective efforts to address the underlying causes that lead people to offend. The strategy is supported by investment in crime prevention grants, continuing to support young people as part of social recovery, as well as funding for key crime prevention partners, including Crime Stoppers Victoria and Neighbourhood Watch Victoria. We are also working on a really, really critical project for us, which is with the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing, to deliver what we know as the common client reform, which will shift the way we in government work not only across departments but with our partners in the NGO sector and with Victoria Police to deliver much more integrated person-centred services that prioritise clients' needs in a holistic and accessible way.

This work acknowledges the crucial points in our client's lives when they need coordinated support across a number of areas. For example, we know that people exiting prison need a range of supports to integrate back into the community and limit the likelihood they will reoffend. This can involve addressing the factors that led to their offending, such as alcohol or substance abuse, and providing opportunities with access to housing and education support. In practice this has meant better coordination and case management of high-priority groups in our community all accessing multiple government services across justice, health and social services.

The pilot program has focused at-risk groups such as young people in residential care and women in custody with limited housing and income supports. The aim is to create a consistent service for clients of our agencies which we have in common across the government. Connecting support staff from across government, sharing case management practices and fostering collaboration at both local and system levels is critical. The common client reform is underpinned by a statewide rollout of local site committees based on the success of a pilot that included four sites in 2020. The LSECs are a partnership between DFFH and this department, and as they mature membership will be expanded to include the Department of Education and Training, Victoria Police and our local sector partners. Establishing activities are underway with the remaining areas right across the state.

In relation to young people, young people are critical stakeholders in the justice portfolio, and our approach has been underpinned by the *Youth Justice Strategic Plan*. It focuses on diverting children and young people away from the youth justice system, and it is already getting results. There are fewer young people offending in Victoria and fewer young people in the justice system. Nationally Victoria had the lowest rate of young people under youth justice supervision in 2019–20 and we are also well ahead of our Aboriginal justice agreement target to reduce the over-representation of Aboriginal children in the system, working in partnership with Aboriginal communities. And that is work we are really proud of within the department—that we have worked so closely with our Aboriginal leaders to ensure that we are reducing those numbers of young people within custody. Recent safety initiatives have also driven down the number of serious incidents in custodial facilities

by 42 per cent and reduced serious assaults by 59 per cent over the last three years. Work is progressing on a new youth justice Act that we hope to introduce into the Parliament very soon.

These successes are in tandem with improvements to custodial infrastructure to better manage young people in youth justice facilities. The Parkville intensive intervention unit has been operating since mid-2020 to provide therapeutic interventions for high-risk young people who cause harm, to reduce their risk of violent behaviour. It includes dedicated staffing and clinical professionals to reduce the risk of violent behaviour. Treatment is often the focus to address the complex needs of our young people in this unit that often include a trauma background, mental health concerns and disability that manifest in behavioural concerns. An intensive intervention unit is also going to be located at the new Cherry Creek youth justice centre once it is operational. Cherry Creek will include 140 beds and focus on challenging young males, and it is expected to be completed in the second half of next year.

As the committee is well aware, the Victorian correction system has changed markedly over the last 15 years. This includes an overall trend towards increases in remand prisoners as a proportion of the overall prison population and a larger proportion of women and particularly Aboriginal women being held on remand. Other trends include a decline in the proportion of people released to parole, and a greater proportion of people are spending short episodes in prison. The COVID-19 pandemic continues to have wideranging impacts right across the criminal justice system, and this has resulted in disruptions to some of the trends that were evident prior to 2019–20 in prison and community corrections populations.

We are currently undertaking progressive reforms in the corrections system to improve the management of adult offenders in custody and in the community. This is an area of extreme complexity, and sustained effort will be required to adjust to these long-term trends. We are focusing on rehabilitation and reintegration services to reduce reoffending and improving the long-term safety of the community. We are also providing prisoners with training, education and employment services to ensure they have the best chance of leading safe and productive lives when they return to the community. We continue to invest in rehabilitation, diversion and reintegration programs, including bail support programs, regional employment pathway programs for community offenders and extended drug and alcohol treatment services. We have been working very closely with the Department of Jobs, Precincts and Regions to ensure that that connection to secure long-term employment is found for people exiting prison.

The rising female prison population has also led to policies and programs and services that better cater to the needs of women. We are progressively implementing reforms that recognise that women in prison often have complex and varied mental health issues and have experienced high rates of victimisation, family violence and trauma.

A key investment has been the women's diversion and rehabilitation strategy, which has included the recruitment of family engagement workers to assist women in custody to heal fractured and problematic relationships and plan their transition back to the family unit. The pandemic has, as I said, presented many challenges to how the department monitors and manages offenders, and I wanted to do a big shout-out to all of the teams that work across the Department of Justice and Community Safety. They have done an extraordinary job in very difficult circumstances to ensure that prisons are maintaining court appearances, that prisoner visitors have continued as much as possible. In the community we shifted to remote service delivery while continuing face-to-face supervision of a small cohort of offenders through COVID-19 risk-based activity, and so we again thank those teams for their extraordinary work.

Just in conclusion, the justice system has undergone significant change in Victoria over recent years and has responded to the unique challenges that have affected all Victorians recently. The challenges facing the system are broader than the pandemic, but in our collective response to it we obviously embrace new approaches that are indicative of a system committed to delivering the best outcomes for the Victorian community. The work of the department over the last three years has been critical to sustaining this important progress as well as building a foundation for better outcomes into the future. So I want to say thank you for your time today, and we look forward to assisting the inquiry with any questions you may have.

The CHAIR: Thank you. I am not sure if we were supposed to be seeing slides or just one slide.

Ms FALKINGHAM: There were three, but that is okay; we will make sure that they are circulated to you.

The CHAIR: That is fine, Rebecca, and I know it covered a lot of what you had presented in your submission as well, so I appreciate that. I might just start off with a couple of quick questions and then I will go to the Deputy Chair, then Tania, then Kaushaliya and then Sheena for this round, so you guys all know. Rebecca, you mentioned the RMIT report into victim services. Your submission said that the government was considering the recommendations, but in your introductory remarks it sounded like you were implementing those recommendations. So has the government made a response to that review?

Ms FALKINGHAM: Thanks, Chair, for your question. As I mentioned, we did conduct that review, and we are thankful to our partners at RMIT. It has given us a blueprint for how we go about improving access to victim support services and mitigating the long-term impacts of victimisation. The number of things that I will just quickly go through that we are already doing as a result of that RMIT work: building greater awareness of services currently available to victims. That was one of the key messages we heard from RMIT, that often services go under-utilised because people just do not know they exist. So we are doing much more work to ensure that information is readily available for people. Promoting the benefits of the victims register and people's understanding—there has always been a hesitancy to go onto the victims register, and obviously as part of the work we are doing at the moment we, as I said, are trying to ensure that the voices of victims are in every part of the system. Being on that register gives us that ability to engage when people feel comfortable. It is really important to us that that is led by the victims themselves. We do not want to push people too hard and too early often.

We have also improved the services to the Aboriginal victims of crime, including through the recruitment of the cultural safety practice lead for victim services, which was a critical RMIT recommendation. We are obviously seeking the Rainbow Tick accreditation to ensure victim services appropriately support LGBTIQ+ victims of crime. We are developing our workplace capability framework for victim support service workers, and in recent years a number of the legislative changes to improve responses to victims of crime were part of that RMIT work as well. You would be aware that in November the government extended the powers of the Victims of Crime Commissioner to include monitoring and reporting on justice agency compliance with the victims charter. So there is still work to do, but we are cracking on at a pace. I am not sure if Melanie would like to add to that.

Dr HEENAN: Thanks, Secretary. Yes, I can certainly add that there has been some work done too within the context of our services. As a provider ourselves we are so acutely aware of what we have learned through that victim services review, and you are probably aware that some 37 victim-survivors were spoken to directly by the Centre for Innovative Justice. So there has been wonderful guidance provided by that report, and the opportunity for us as a provider—we deliver a range of services to victims of crime—to understand what victims and stakeholders said to us through that review and to be, I guess, implementing that immediately. Victims talked with us a lot about the extent to which they wanted services to reach out to them, to be more proactive. We certainly have taken that on board and are looking at how we implement that through the helpline and through the victims assistance program.

They also talk to us about the fact that sometimes when they disengage from services for very good reasons—they may have their practical needs met at the time, and there is a period of time between that and the next milestone possibly, a court proceeding, something that is another milestone moment—they may not have contact with services for a period of time. We are not great, I do not think, as a system yet in reconnecting with victims, and so we are really keen to implement that kind of work as well in the service delivery that we offer.

The CHAIR: Thank you. I will come back when I have some questions about corrections, so I will turn to the Deputy Chair, Tien Kieu.

Dr KIEU: Thank you, Chair. Thank you for your participation here today, and thank you for your huge amount of work. In fact it is so big that you are responsible for five ministers and many different portfolios.

You have covered many areas. In the interests of time, I have only two quick questions. The first one is about the Drug Court system. I had the opportunity to visit one in Dandenong and heard the testimony of some of the people who were taking part in that, and it was quite successful. Can you comment on whether that system could be or should be extended to any other areas of sentencing?

Ms FALKINGHAM: Sorry, Deputy Chair, you just broke up for a minute. Are you talking about the intermediary program? Is that what you just referenced?

Dr KIEU: Yes, the Drug Court system, where there is unactivated sentencing and also there are certain requirements—for example, treatment for certain people. Instead of being sent to custody they are put back to participate in that, and also they have to satisfy certain requirements like treatment, and they have to have regular tests, whether it is blood tests or some other way to be sure that they are not reoffending.

Ms FALKINGHAM: Yes. Thank you. It is an excellent question. Problem-solving courts are, we really think, the way of the future. We have looked at a lot of models internationally, and obviously we have looked at a whole range of different not only cohorts but also some of the—as I discussed earlier—underlying drivers of crime. We are working with Court Services Victoria and the Magistrates Court to roll out the Drug Court regionally to Ballarat and Shepparton, with hearings expected to begin in early 2022, and the committee would be well aware of some of the data that exists both in Ballarat and in Shepparton in relation to some of the offending that we see. We think that it will be a real game changer in those LGAs in terms of allowing the Drug Court to be able to supervise offenders trapped in the cycle of substance-related offending and provide much more targeted treatment and supports to reduce the risk of reoffending and further harm by holding offenders accountable for their actions.

The existing Drug Courts in Melbourne and Dandenong have proved to be really successful, with results from two independent evaluations showing I think it is a 70 per cent reduction in the number of prison days required for participants who would have been placed in custody if not for the drug treatment order and a 23 per cent reduction in reoffending rates for program participants compared to the control group, rising to a 68 per cent reduction for participants who have graduated from the program. They are quite extraordinary statistics, and the cost-benefit ratio of a \$5 community dividend for every one dollar spent on the program is something that I remind our colleagues in the Department of Treasury and Finance about all the time—that it is a good investment to make into the future of the courts.

Dr KIEU: Thank you. I may come back to another question later if there is time.

The CHAIR: Thank you. Tania.

Ms MAXWELL: Thank you, Chair. Thank you so much for joining us today. Melanie, it has been a long time since I have seen you. It is lovely to see you again.

I just want to follow up on the victims and the RMIT report. Melanie, is there any update that you can provide on how victims of crime are being supported now throughout the justice system? I do a lot of work with victims of crime, and what I often hear back is they feel that the system has let them down; they feel that they have been failed. Some of them have watched our hearings and have said, ‘All I’m hearing is about the offender’s rights, the offender’s rights’.

Another thing that they do bring up with me is funding. Funding can be very quickly refused or exhausted, particularly for those that have had a loved one either be murdered or experience a very serious, whether it be sexual or violent, crime. Is there anything that is being done, and probably more specifically—and you might have to take this on notice—within regional and rural areas? Because that is the commonality that I see around a lot of the victims that speak to me.

Dr HEENAN: Thanks so much for that question. It has got a number of different elements to it. So perhaps taking the first one, which I think is just the sense in which victims still talk about feeling failed by that system or by the system, I can understand how valuable it must have been for the inquiry to hear from victims and victim-survivors throughout the past weeks. We, too, focus so centrally on what victims tell us about their experience of the system and fortunately we do have the enormous benefit, and in fact I have the great privilege, of having the secretariat that supports the Victims of Crime Consultative Committee and the victim representatives on that committee, a few of whom I think you are hearing from this afternoon. That allows us to often have a firsthand view and viewpoint from victims about the system and about where the system is continuing to fail victims and perhaps particularly where the gaps still reside in the system.

I think the CIJ, the Centre for Innovative Justice, victim services review report gave us again great guidance on where those gaps lie for many victims. Reports that have been delivered by the Victorian Law Reform

Commission also give us a tremendous steer on where we need to devote our attention in addressing those gaps for victims. And it depends, I guess, on where victims are in the system. So in terms of support services, they may feel that support services are not seamless for them, and we have certainly heard that message, rightly, from victims—that it is not as seamless as it should be and that there should be greater continuity across the service system, which is not one system; it is made up of lots of different elements. So we have to be better at the back end, making sure that we can bring that continuity to victims and that we as an infrastructure are able to work in a much more coordinated way. We are increasingly doing that, certainly through our own functions. We provide services from that gateway to the victim support system through the helpline and through to the localised victims assistance programs, but we also deliver court support services through the Child Witness Service and the intermediary program. So we ourselves know that we can do better in linking victims through the system who may not know that we are part of the one machinery, so to speak.

In terms of the rural and regional question, I think that is an area that we are also making some good strides in, but again we need to keep listening to victims and victim-survivors about what else they need to address some of those real fundamentals for them in regional and rural areas. One of the things that we know has made a huge difference to victims—and in fact it is one of those silver linings in the COVID context—is that we have been able to stand up innovation for victims who are going to court, particularly those who would otherwise be attending court physically. During COVID we have been able to establish the virtual court support program, which has meant that we have been able to connect victims in regional and rural areas in with, for example, plea proceedings where they want to be part of the proceeding. They may want to read their victim impact statement, because it is such an important process for victims, or they may just want to view the proceeding, even if they do not want to participate in it. For regional and rural victim-survivors, that can sometimes be the difference between them attending or being part of it at all, because they do not want to travel into Melbourne, even in non-COVID times. For some victims it is a sense of safety that they feel is compromised. So that has been an initiative that we really want to continue to learn from and continue to listen to victims about. They have also been able to join sentencing hearings and so forth when they would not have otherwise been able to attend and participate or observe.

I think the other area is the victims assistance program. The victims assistance program does have a reach into the regional and rural parts of this state. They have co-locations with police stations and with other support services, some of those in Aboriginal community controlled organisations. Again, I think we can do better at co-locating VAPs in other contexts as well, where victims may be presenting in the first instance, but we need obviously the benefit and expertise of our victims assistance program workers, who understand how to navigate that system.

I think perhaps to summarise—and certainly let me know if I have not addressed any part of your question—that is something that we know that we can really improve on in relation to putting the building blocks around a better sense of continuity for victims and that is something that the review also gave us a really, really good blueprint around.

Ms MAXWELL: Thank you, Melanie.

The CHAIR: Thank you. Kaushaliya.

Ms VAGHELA: Thanks, Chair. And thanks Rebecca, Melanie and Larissa, for your submission and for your time today and the great amount of work that you do to support many, many stakeholders. My question relates to some of the topics that you have just raised during your initial remarks, and I would like you to elaborate a little bit more on those. The government released its new *Crime Prevention Strategy* earlier this year. Can you please elaborate on its key themes and how it affects the delivery of primary prevention programs across government?

Ms FALKINGHAM: Thank you for your question. So our *Crime Prevention Strategy* is one that we are very proud of because it is very much community led. We have spent a lot of time talking to local communities, led by Minister Hutchins. We need to set out a really clear long-term approach to how government will work with Victorian local councils, police, communities, businesses and key organisations to address the key risk factors, intervening early and preventing crime before it occurs.

We have four outcomes in our prevention strategy. The first is Victorian communities are more connected, cohesive and engaged in designing and delivering local solutions to prevent crime; fewer Victorians are coming into contact with the criminal justice system; more people at risk of offending are connected with earlier, more effective support; and Victorians are safer and feel safer—and it is really important as a community that we can feel safe.

The strategy does set out to achieve these really ambitious goals around three action areas, and we learned a lot from the New York crime prevention approach. So we looked at empowering and investing in communities to deliver local solutions to local issues, enhancing and connecting the right supports for people in communities so they get the right help at the right time, which is something we heard really loudly and clearly back from victims of crime: that we needed to strengthen the evidence of what works in crime prevention so that we can maximise our collective impact. Often we invest in things that might not be making a difference, and we continue on with those for a while. So this is a really evidence-led strategy, and it has been really critical that we do recognise that complex causes of crime do require, as I mentioned earlier, that sustained effort across government and the need to build on major Victorian government reforms, particularly in housing, employment, mental health, education and family violence. So we are really trying to leverage off those big investments in those other reforms as well, particularly around housing.

As I said, we did really develop the consultation, not just across government but also right across community, to really guide and have for the first time strong measurement in relation to the impact of the reforms that address the risk factors associated with offending, such as unemployment and disengagement from education. The strategy does aim to align with a broad focus around early intervention, some of the work the department of treasury is leading at the moment around early intervention to support Victorians in need.

Progressing across the four outcomes will be measured. We think it is quite world leading, our strategy in relation to some of the measures, and the need to determine the collective impacts of others right across the portfolio. And what we do try and do, as I said earlier, is make sure these people are much less likely to come into contact with the justice system in the first place.

Ms VAGHELA: Following a report by this committee, the government has now legislated a spent convictions scheme for Victoria, which I understand the department is currently implementing. Can you give the committee an update on this work and outline how it will reduce recidivism in Victoria?

Ms FALKINGHAM: Yes. As I mentioned earlier, it is fantastic reform, and reform that we acknowledge in the department has been a long time coming. Obviously there are challenges historical convictions have caused for individuals and families and communities, especially when it comes to rehabilitation and reintegration. That Act does come into effect on 1 December, with the court application process for more serious convictions commencing in the middle of next year. You would be aware that under the act certain convictions will become spent and not appear on criminal records after a person has demonstrated their rehabilitation by successfully completing a period of crime-free behaviour. We know that the impacts of historical convictions can often result in a cycle of disadvantage and entrenchment in the justice system and even encourage further reoffending. In particular the focus, as you would all be aware of, in relation to children and young people to ensure that the impacts of their criminal records are not felt that will impact on not only their long-term life goals but also their more immediate education and training attainment goals, employment and social development goals. So the Act will help people with those historic convictions. In providing those opportunities the Act will support people with historic convictions to help them actually go through the application process to ensure that their convictions are spent.

We are in the process of being able to go out and talk to people about how the Act will impact on them and what further supports the department is offering to people that want to seek to have their convictions spent. We are also obviously making really clear and transparent the kinds of exemptions that enable specified agencies to continue to access a person's full criminal history, and that will be in exceptional circumstances, as the Parliament passed.

Ms VAGHELA: Thank you. Thanks, Chair.

The CHAIR: Thank you. Sheena.

Ms WATT: Thank you, Chair. What might come as a surprise to no-one, I have questions around Aboriginal justice. Throughout this inquiry I have asked a series of questions around Aboriginal justice, and in our most recent hearing we actually had representatives from the Aboriginal Justice Caucus come along. It was really good to hear more about their role and partnership with AJA4, I think we are up to. I particularly am interested in Aboriginal victims of crime. We have heard that there is still a lot of work to be done about making sure that we have culturally appropriate and accessible victims of crime support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. I am just noting that work is in progress. I am just interested to know more. What needs to happen to improve Aboriginal communities accessing victims of crime support and the availability of victims of crime services and specialty with Aboriginal communities? That is probably one, and when we circle about I will probably have another one. But I will leave that to the Chair to determine.

Ms FALKINGHAM: I might throw back—as I mentioned earlier, the RMIT work did call this out specifically, and we have obviously implemented practice change and are a practice leader in the department—but I'll throw to Mel to answer.

Dr HEENAN: Thanks, Secretary. We are also in the very early stages of finalising a consortium that will be undertaking some consultations across the Aboriginal communities but certainly directly with Aboriginal victims of crime in a bid, I guess, to develop an Aboriginal victims of crime strategy. So we absolutely agree, Ms Watt, that Aboriginal victims of crime are completely over-represented as victims. They have sometimes long histories of trauma and victimisation, but they are completely under-represented in the services that we provide. So it is absolutely a focus for us to make sure that this Aboriginal victims of crime strategy really helps us to understand how to do better in providing services to Aboriginal victims. We are doing this work in partnership with KJU, the Koori justice unit. We have had the Aboriginal Justice Caucus involved in helping us select the consortium of organisations that will lead those consultations, because we need those consultations obviously to be Aboriginal led and we need them to be conducted in a culturally safe way. Those consultations I think are kicking off early into the new calendar year, and we hope to have some good insights into what that strategy might entail.

I should also say that we have Koori engagement workers that operate out of our victims assistance programs. They are specialist workers who work in the context of those VAPs that are themselves in a host organisation. They are across the state. At least one Koori engagement worker operates out of each of the VAPs—in fact I think there may be 10 FTE that are funded—to deliver the Koori engagement work.

But we are also keen to continue to keep working with that really important workforce, because they need to be well supported in their host organisations. They too need to feel culturally safe in their workplaces, and we are in the throes of developing some good practice guidance for organisations to make sure that they are appropriately supporting their staff but also that they keep their caseloads at an appropriate level, because one of the things that we are really cognisant of is the extent to which Koori engagement workers need to do work with communities. Because if communities do not feel safe, and understandably so, to come into our services, then we need to go to them to talk with communities about what might help them to feel safer in coming into services—or deliver the services where they feel safer. So Koori engagement workers, that workforce as a whole, meet as a community of practice, and they are often giving advice on how best to do that and the weighting, I guess, about how much time should be spent with communities so that time is really valued as well as being able to provide that individual case management support for Aboriginal victims that are coming into the victims assistance programs.

Ms WATT: Thank you.

The CHAIR: Thanks, Sheena. Thank you. I just want to turn to employment. As this committee conducted the spent convictions inquiry, we heard that it is one of the great protectors for recidivism and it is one of the great protectors. I see in your submission—and you mentioned it in your opening remarks—that work with Jobs Victoria, and I want to have a greater understanding of the employment that occurs in prisons. What work are they doing? I guess I want to get a better understanding of the mechanism of that. And the work that prisoners do in prison—does that lead to employment with the same employer once they leave prison? I would be interested also in the wages of prisoners while they are in the system.

Ms FALKINGHAM: Thanks, Chair. I might ask Acting Commissioner Strong to respond to that.

Ms STRONG: Thanks for the question, Chair. Ninety-four per cent of prisoners are actually working in employment in the prison system. That comprises people who work in prison industries. Each prison runs different industries; often they have contracts with private providers to make metalwork or fences or furniture et cetera or do woodwork. So a lot of the 94 per cent is about prison industries. It is attached to TAFE and certificates. Obviously people need an OH&S certificate to even start that work, they might need to get other certificates as well, and there are trained prison industry supervisors, who are often qualified tradespeople themselves in terms of that skill that they are learning.

The other component of the, I guess, work that is done in prisons is billet positions within prisons, such as cleaners and essential workforce positions in prisons. So over COVID we actually upped the training and we had TAFE deliver—I always forget the certificates; I think it was certificate III—two different certificates in cleaning to do with specialist infection control cleaning, so really giving them a much higher qualification in terms of their cleaning, around infection control and touch point cleaning, as part of our response to a hygienic prison system around that during COVID.

So the employment within prisons is a combination of prison industries—contracts to deliver on furniture, we do screen-printing and make signs, a lot of metalwork and metal fabrication. Food production is an increasing area, so we have vegetable processing, coffee processing and manufacturing and food processing, knowing that that is a growth area in the community. Warehouse distribution has also been a big focus and learning about managing a warehouse and warehouse distributions and point-of-sale systems—skills that certainly are needed in the community and where there are jobs in the community. So that is what prison employment does. It does link in with TAFE and the formal TAFE that is also available in all of the prison systems, and about 30 per cent of prisoners are engaged in TAFE training at any one point in time.

Together they are really looking at what is the strategy then—and I guess this is your question—to convert to actually getting a job on the outside. There are a number of components to that. In the women's system we have piloted women's employment specialists, who are really linking with the women. They all have a vocational plan done when they come into prison, a literacy and numeracy assessment and a vocational plan about what are their training and learning needs—

The CHAIR: Sorry, Acting Commissioner, can I just ask—that is interesting, that assessment—is that done for all prisoners? Because I know when we are looking at the stats you have got people, particularly women, coming in for such short sentences. Are they also benefiting from that assessment?

Ms STRONG: It will depend on how long they are with us, Chair, so it has certainly not got any link to being on remand or sentenced. It is available to everyone, but obviously you need to be in for a couple of weeks to start to be at the point where you are doing a literacy and numeracy assessment. So yes, you do need to be with us for a set amount of time, but you do not need a long sentence, and certainly for remandees, if you are in and out within a few weeks you probably would not get that language and literacy assessment and a vocational plan.

In terms of converting to a job, the women's employment specialists are really about converting to jobs and opportunities in the community. We are also looking at the social procurement framework that is available in terms of contracts that government have and looking at leveraging, when we are purchasing things to supply prisons, if we are training people—you know, is there an opportunity for jobs for people on the outside? We do have a few MOUs with people like John Holland, linked to a centre for construction excellence, which have actually placed people in work, and the same at Ravenhall, where YMCA programs also place people into work.

Ms FALKINGHAM: If I may, Chair, I was going to add, to go to your point around churn around remand, it is an issue that worries us greatly, and we have spent a lot of time thinking through how we can better tailor programs to cater for people that often are coming in and out of our system—so it is an area where we continue to explore. I am not sure if the committee has been aware of a pilot project that we led with the Department of Jobs, Precincts and Regions but also the private sector and community organisations called Out for Good, which was trying to look at what else we can do to make people job ready and be able to secure housing. It did really go to us that in making that connection we need to make sure that the person who is doing the transition into full-time employment stays connected to the prisoner upon release and that we can continue to check in on a whole range of other services they can be accessing—because as you know, people often go into that

employment and exit the employment quite quickly. So the Out for Good pilot program is definitely one that we intend to continue, but I wholeheartedly agree with your position around that churn in remand and how we can better tailor and focus some of our programs.

The CHAIR: So how much does a prisoner get paid if they are building furniture or screen-printing, and with those private companies, is part of the memorandum of understanding that they will employ people when they exit the prison system?

Ms STRONG: If we have an MOU with an employer, that is what it is about. It is actually about a job in the community when people get out of prison.

The CHAIR: Do we have those with private industry?

Ms STRONG: We do—Labour Hire and John Holland are examples, but they are not necessarily linked to purchasing within prison industries, so they are different things.

The CHAIR: That is right.

Ms STRONG: There are three different rates of pay, and it depends on what level they are doing. It is between about \$6.95 a day and about \$9 a day, so there is a range.

The CHAIR: Great. Has there been any assessment of any of these things that are working? Like, when we look at the statistics it seems prisoners are exiting into homelessness and prisoners have got incredibly high unemployment rates, and we know that both of those statistics lead to people coming back into the justice system. You mentioned Out for Good. We spoke to VACRO earlier and they just said, 'We just don't have the resources to provide the support, the ongoing support that people leaving the prison system need'. Can we expect more resources to be put into that end of the justice system soon?

Ms FALKINGHAM: I cannot comment on funding commitments; I will leave that to the government. But it goes to the presentation, where I outlined the work around common client. One of the groups that we are working on is young men exiting the prison system, because absolutely we believe that there needs to be that wraparound, be it AOD, be it mental health, be it housing, be it secure employment—and having case management that allows that person to go about their life and not have to interact with seven or eight different parts of government is really critical for that. Just having that person—I am sure we have mentioned—someone checking in that someone is okay, that they are going to work every day and that they have got everything they need, is resource intensive, which is why we did the pilot. And as I said, it is one of the things we want to continue into the future. It is also about how we embed that in our justice regional services as usual, normal practice—that that connection continues for people that are not under any kind of supervision as well. So that is work in progress for us. We were really heartened by the participants in the pilot that have remained in secure employment.

The CHAIR: Thank you. I am aware of the time. I apologise. Dr Tien Kieu.

Dr KIEU: Thank you. The global pandemic has presented many challenges for us all over the world and particularly for people in custodial facilities. Could you update us on what the situation is at present for the staff and for the people, particularly the young people, in custody, and what kinds of challenges and what kinds of lessons can we learn going forward?

The CHAIR: Before you answer that, if I could just say, I apologise, we have only got about 10 or 15 minutes left, so if we can try and keep the responses brief, then everyone can have another question.

Ms FALKINGHAM: No worries. I will be brief. I will just start by saying we are really proud of our staff that are often forgotten as frontline workers. They have continued to work right throughout the pandemic, and as I said, putting in place and trying to maintain normality as much as possible in relation to connection. We rolled out really quickly iPads and tablets to enable that connection back into families at home, and we have heard some wonderful stories that I am sure the acting commissioner will talk to. We have had really up-to-date COVID risk management. We were lucky that we learned from international experiences. We have all seen the awful stories of how COVID ripped through prison systems internationally, and we were determined to make sure that, touch wood, did not happen in our state and ensure that we worked really closely with the Department

of Health to make sure we got the best PPE, the best social distancing, the best arrangements in relation to our vaccination program. I am sure the commissioner will speak to this, but we obviously now have no staff working within the corrections or youth justice systems that are not fully vaccinated. We also have really high rates of prisoner vaccination now as well, as well as introducing rapid antigen testing across a number of our prisons at the moment, but I will see if the commissioner wants to add anything to that.

Ms STRONG: I think that is a good summary. Since wave 6 started, or lockdown 6 I should say, we have had 170 COVID-positive prisoners in the prison system. They are all pretty much new entrants that have come in within the first two weeks and been picked up as part of our protective quarantine system, so it has been an ongoing challenge and the system has really managed that well in terms of no widespread outbreaks anywhere within the prison system.

COVID has also, I guess, allowed some innovation in the prison system too, so absolutely the Zoom visits—we have had 20 000 more Zoom visits compared to face-to-face visits in the previous calendar year. They are very good for people who have got family overseas and also getting to see their home and their home context. AVL—we have done a lot of court by AVL. I think last year 98 per cent of court matters were heard via AVL, and certainly when you hear the feedback from the prisoner group they respond quite positively to AVL in that component with them. We have introduced protective quarantine services, so proactive wellbeing check-ins for people who are in quarantine for 14 days, using our clinicians to see how they are going and how they are coping with that component of that process. So it has been an ongoing process, as it has been everywhere, and we adapt and change our procedures depending on where we are at with community transmission and as the virus changes.

Dr KIEU: Thank you.

The CHAIR: Thank you. Tania.

Ms MAXWELL: Thank you, Chair. So many questions, so little time. Rebecca, in the submission there is an absolute plethora of programs available within the justice system. I was astonished and very grateful to see all that. But I am wondering whether you have access to the evaluations that actually go with the outcomes of those programs, given that you spoke about investing in things that may not be making a difference. You have also spoken about early intervention and that primary prevention. I am wondering whether you have the evaluations, because they are imperative if we are going to make recommendations which may inform policy. We have to have those comparisons of early intervention because I do not look at these specifically as early interventions. I am about talking about preventing people from becoming involved in the justice system as opposed to these programs, which are mainly for people who are already involved in the justice system. And secondly, one of the reasons I would like those evaluations is that we are seeing riots in Parkville and Malmsbury which would suggest that those programs are not working to reduce violence and serious assaults. So how are they also being addressed?

Ms FALKINGHAM: I am not sure about riots in Malmsbury and Parkville, but I will come to the substantive question. So across every part of the justice system we run either internal or external evaluations on everything. We are deeply committed to understanding and not setting and forgetting, making sure under our outcomes framework in the department that every initiative is making a difference. So absolutely, I can take it on notice. We will see what evaluations we can provide. Often our evaluations go to individuals and to issues of privacy, but we are really happy to take it on board and provide the committee with any of the evaluations that we can. Any obviously that are external, we are really happy to provide. It is probably worth pointing out to the committee that we have the justice assurance and review office that exists within the department, which is our internal mechanism to look at and review incidents and issues as they arise. But I am really happy to take that on notice. I would also like to just point out that category 1 incidents are 42 per cent down right across the youth justice system, as I said in my presentation earlier today.

Ms MAXWELL: Thank you.

The CHAIR: Great. Thank you. Kaushaliya.

Ms VAGHELA: Thanks, Chair. And just a quick one for Rebecca: during your presentation you mentioned about leading work on a national process considering changes to defamation laws to encourage reporting of alleged crimes and misconduct. Can you please explain a little bit more about that?

Ms FALKINGHAM: Sorry—defamation?

Ms VAGHELA: Yes. During your initial remarks in your presentation there was mention of leading work on national processes considering changes to defamation laws so that we encourage reporting of alleged crimes and misconduct—if you can explain that a little bit more.

Ms FALKINGHAM: Okay. So within the Meeting of Attorneys-General there is national work underway currently, being led and driven by Victoria and New South Wales, in relation to how we ensure that we get the most robust defamation laws. There is a Meeting of Attorneys-General coming up next week that will discuss this matter in more detail, and I am sure an announcement will be made imminently, after that, about the next steps of that work.

Ms VAGHELA: Thank you. Thanks, Chair.

The CHAIR: Great. Thank you. Sheena.

Ms WATT: Thank you, Chair. I was not sure we would get around to me for an additional question, so I appreciate you coming to me; thank you very much. Just further to my point around victims of crime, I wanted to follow up, asking particularly about diversion programs for Koori women. What does it look like in terms of access to diversion programs? Is there more work to be done? It is just quite extraordinary the numbers that we are starting to see around Aboriginal women in custodial settings, and so I just wanted to hear from you a little bit more about any work that is being done by the department and of course with the caucus and others on improving Koori women's diversion.

Ms FALKINGHAM: Thank you for your question. Obviously it is a deep priority for the Aboriginal Justice Caucus, and we talk to them often about this area. So as you would be aware, since 2018 the government has provided \$85 million to support implementation of AJA4, including \$33 million in last year's budget. This has enabled the development of the expansion of culturally sensitive and relevant systems for Aboriginal women across community courts and custodial settings, including settings for Aboriginal women supported under the agreement, and as you know, it has been very important that that work is Aboriginal community led. That has included a number of priorities, including the following bail support and diversion programs: so we have the Koori women's diversion program, which is the intensive and holistic case management and practical support to enable Aboriginal women to have access to the services in the right place and at the right time; and also the women's bail project, which is our new culturally and gender specific support program for Aboriginal women involved in the correctional system to obtain bail and avoid remand.

For younger Aboriginal women—I know it is something that you are deeply committed to—we have looked at a gender lens to expand community-based youth justice worker programs as part of an \$11.9 million investment in the youth justice system. This has led to more female workers being employed to support Aboriginal girls. The ACCOs are really deeply involved in the development of that, and that has led to the 42 per cent reduction in the average daily number of Aboriginal children in our youth justice system. So we will continue to drive that work because we know it makes a difference in terms of having Aboriginal-based community workers within our custodial system. I will just check if the Acting Commissioner wants to respond any further to that.

Ms STRONG: The only other thing I would probably note is that under the Aboriginal justice agreement we also got funding, and VALS and Aboriginal Housing Victoria developed a transitional housing program purpose built for Aboriginal women called Baggarrook; it can house up to six women, and that is irrespective of their legal status, supporting them to be out of custody if there is an issue of housing and support that goes with that. So that has been up and running now for over a year. We also funded the Djirra legal service to provide legal assistance and non-legal assistance to women in the custodial centre as well as post-release support to those women as well. So those are certainly other AJA initiatives we have worked with the Caucus on as well.

Ms WATT: A quick follow-up. That transitional housing piece that you have just spoken about—is there more information you can provide on that? Perhaps that is—

Ms STRONG: Of course.

The CHAIR: A follow-up.

Ms WATT: A follow-up. Thank you.

The CHAIR: Thank you. Look, it would be very remiss of me not to ask a quick question at the end. It is around judicial appointments in regional areas. We have certainly been hearing a little bit about this from some of our other witnesses. So I am wondering what the difficulties are, or whether you do find difficulties, in finding judicial officers for regional areas—that they understand regional areas, that they are not so close to the community that it creates conflicts of interest. And is there any consideration of more of a Magistrates circuit court, as we have available for County and Supreme courts?

Ms FALKINGHAM: I might leave the latter to the Attorney to respond to, but in relation to regional appointments, we have done a lot of work with both the Magistrates and VCAT to run transparent, open recruitment so we are able to have a wider reach right across the state—to not only ensure we have stronger regional representation. It is a struggle to attract people that want to work in the regions, and obviously discussions we have are around how to get people to have more experience working regionally as well, even if they do want to come back to Melbourne.

We have had great success working with both VCAT and the Magistrates over the last few years in terms of increasing the diversity of judicial appointments, and we will continue to monitor that and work through that with the courts.

The CHAIR: Thank you very much. Thank you so much for your time today and for the submission. I think it has been really interesting hearing about some of the positive impacts that COVID has had on the system and changes that will probably become permanent.

As I mentioned at the outset, you will receive a transcript of today's hearing. Please do have a check of it and make sure that we have not misrepresented or misheard you. I appreciate that you are taking on notice some of the evaluations of some of those programs that were mentioned, and we would also be very interested in any updates on Victoria's implementation of the OPCAT, the Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture. I think there is certainly work that you have been doing, but I did not see it in the submission, so any updates you can provide on the implementation of that would be terrific.

Thank you very much to everyone. The committee will take a short break and return for our next witness at 11.00 am.

Witnesses withdrew.