

TRANSCRIPT

PUBLIC ACCOUNTS AND ESTIMATES COMMITTEE

Budget Estimates 2019–20 (Crime Prevention)

Melbourne—Friday, 14 June 2019

Members

Mr Philip Dalidakis—Chair

Mr Richard Riordan—Deputy Chair

Mr Sam Hibbins

Mr Gary Maas

Mr Danny O'Brien

Ms Pauline Richards

Mr Tim Richardson

Ms Ingrid Stitt

Ms Bridget Vallence

WITNESSES

Mr Ben Carroll, Minister for Crime Prevention,

Ms Rebecca Falkingham, Secretary, and

Ms Corri McKenzie, Deputy Secretary, Police, Fines and Crime Prevention, Department of Justice and Community Safety.

The CHAIR: Good evening, everybody. I declare open this hearing of the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee.

On behalf of the Parliament, the committee is conducting this inquiry into the 2019–20 Budget Estimates. Its aim is to scrutinise public administration and finance to improve outcomes for the Victorian community.

The committee will now begin consideration of the portfolio of crime prevention. I welcome the Minister for Crime Prevention, the Honourable Benjamin Carroll, and officers from the department, and I thank you all for attending before us today.

All evidence that is given is protected by the Parliamentary Committees Act. This means that it attracts parliamentary privilege and is protected from judicial review. Witnesses found to be giving false or misleading evidence may be in contempt of Parliament and subject to penalty, including having to fact-check anything that President Trump says.

Minister, I invite you to make a very brief opening statement or presentation of no more than 5 minutes. This will be followed by questions from the committee.

Visual presentation.

Mr CARROLL: Thank you, Chair. The 2019–20 state budget includes \$5 million to develop a new crime prevention reform agenda for Victoria. This investment will support partnerships with community, business and sporting groups to deliver initiatives that better address the causes of crime and ensure at-risk Victorians have support they need early on. This will include new pathways to work and training and new initiatives focused on safe homes and communities. It will also support research to build the evidence base in Victoria, along with testing new, innovative approaches to crime prevention. This builds on the \$25 million investment over four years made in the 18–19 budget to continue the Community Crime Prevention Program, and the \$19.4 million investment over two years made in 2016–17. The \$18.2 million budgeted output funding figure for crime prevention includes \$9.9 million for the Community Crime Prevention Program, including the grants themselves and staffing and administrative costs. It also includes \$8.3 million for countering violent extremism, which is a shared responsibility with the Minister for Police and Emergency Services.

In 2015, whilst I was the Parliamentary Secretary for Justice, I led a review of the crime prevention program to consider its role in supporting local crime prevention. My review found that the crime prevention program was an effective program delivered in accordance with best practice principles and was effective in building community knowledge about crime prevention by requiring evaluation of grants programs, establishing and maintaining a crime prevention website and communicating written and verbal crime prevention information to communities. It is also effective in developing partnerships with communities in accordance with good governance principles for good partnerships. My review also found that the crime prevention program grants administration is fair and equitable and the division of grant funding is based on demonstrated need, as grant applicants are required to provide evidence to support their approach. My review also backed up a lot of the evidence that was presented by the Australian Institute of Criminology report.

The 2018–19 state budget committed an additional \$25 million over four years to continue the crime prevention program, building on the two-year \$9.4 million investment in 2016. Since 2015 the Andrews Labor government has invested in more than 700 community-led, evidence-based crime prevention brokers in Victoria to a value of around \$36 million. Around 2000 young people have participated in activities funded through youth crime prevention grants, including more than 400 young people who received or are receiving intensive support to

turn their lives around. Almost 250 CCTV cameras have been funded across 21 municipalities to help improve perception of safety in public places. We have also funded security improvements at more than 281 community facilities, including sports clubs, community halls and neighbourhood houses.

When we surveyed councils who receive the graffiti prevention grant, 87 per cent of respondents felt their graffiti prevention grant project was effective in preventing or reducing graffiti. Our investments include \$18 million to fund 43 projects under the Youth Crime Prevention Grants program to prevent youth offending and reoffending.

The 2019 state budget includes \$5 million to develop a new crime prevention agenda that will be a new reform agenda for crime prevention in Victoria. This investment will support partnerships with the community, business and sporting groups to deliver initiatives that better address the causes of crime and ensure at-risk Victorians have the support they need early on. This will include new pathways to work and training and new initiatives focused on safe homes and communities.

I had the very great pleasure on 31 May to launch the new crime prevention task force. In a Victorian first, the task force will bring together leaders from business, industry, sport, media and the community. The task force will also be chaired by me as the crime prevention minister and will meet regularly and work with experts in the field to help find the best way to prevent crime in our state.

By tapping into their knowledge and experience we will get a better understanding of the many, many ways crime impacts Victorians and the opportunities we have to make lasting, positive changes. We had the first task force meeting this Tuesday, and everybody in the room was excited and energised by this important opportunity. The \$5 million will also support research to build the evidence base in Victoria along, with testing new, innovative approaches to crime prevention. That is the conclusion of my presentation, Chair.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Minister; 2 minutes ahead of schedule. We will move straight to questions.

Mr MAAS: Thank you, Minister, for your appearance and for your presentation. We might look at budget outcomes to begin with, and, Minister, I refer you to budget paper 3, page 81, where it refers to the crime prevention program. Would you be able to elaborate on what the program is and how it helps prevent crime?

Mr CARROLL: I certainly can, Mr Maas, and thank you for your question. It is a program I know quite well in the sense that I did a review of the crime prevention program in 2015 for the then minister for corrections and police. Essentially the program has a CPTED focus—crime prevention through environmental design—which was developed essentially back in the 60s in North America. Through the broken windows principle, a lot of the grants in that program, the Public Safety Infrastructure Fund in particular, fund the rollout of murals, lighting, CCTV—anything that can support an environment that brings the public to it rather than is quiet or unnatural. This program goes to the heart of that.

One thing I found that was missing, and if you look at the work of Jesuit Social Services, there was a bit of a missing focus on some of our disadvantaged, marginalised communities. It is often quoted that 50 per cent of our prisoners come from just 6 per cent of postcodes. I put some recommendations to the then minister which he accepted and implemented where we then set up a more targeted place-based grant funding program to target some of these disadvantaged communities.

The other thing that was missing—as I said, it was a sort of a CPTED environmental design focus—was a programmatic response. That saw us initially start investing in a program called Communities That Care, and we are funding that through different parts of Victoria. That essentially has come out again from North America. It is evidence based. Deakin University and the Murdoch Children's Research Institute support it. It basically takes that long-term view of working with communities, addressing some of the causes and making sure that they have the support they need.

Above and beyond those measures, Mr Maas, we are continuing to support Crime Stoppers, Neighbourhood Watch and the National Motor Theft Reduction Council—for those who are not aware, that runs an important program with Mission Australia called Synergy Auto Repairs, basically diverting young boys and girls who may have an interest in stealing vehicles or damaging vehicles to a career path to become a panelbeater or to

work in a trade where they might have an interest. It is a very important social enterprise that we are continuing to support, and I have been out and seen that repair place firsthand in North Melbourne.

Our \$25 million investment is providing dividends. It has got great input from local government. I think it has got a further investment to make, but I think we are going to see some more innovative place-based investments and some great policy ideas come out of the task force.

Mr MAAS: Thank you for detailing those initiatives, Minister. I would like to take you to your presentation where you discuss the Public Safety Infrastructure Fund. Would you be able to explain for the committee what the program does and how it helps keep communities safe?

Mr CARROLL: Sure. As part of our \$25 million investment in the community crime prevention program our Public Safety Infrastructure Fund offers grants of up to \$250 000 to councils to undertake urban design initiatives and public safety technology to improve safety in public places, whether it be the bouldering wall in Brunswick or whether it be the Lighting the Way project in St Albans, these are innovative projects. What is great about the crime prevention unit is they have also led world's best practice in this area. Often some of our projects and partnerships with local government have been put up for awards. I know the bouldering project in Brunswick received lots of acclamation for its innovative design. Often with these projects it takes a lot of work with the local traders, the local community and the local councils that essentially on the ground know what sorts of measures are required.

We often have a forum with local government. We bring them in. We might highlight what London are doing or other places around the world, and it becomes a very important discussion on how we can use the Public Safety Infrastructure Fund to put some innovative places and practices right through the community. I have seen some wonderful projects. I have seen table tennis tables embedded in local communities, and even as part of sky rail I have seen underneath that essentially crime prevention through environmental design through additional parkland, lighting, walkways, barbecue areas. This, without the public knowing, is very much crime prevention through the design framework and the work of architects and criminologists coming together to implement innovative projects. That \$250 000 is available, and it is open right now. Indeed I have seen a lot of local members jumping on it and supporting their local councils with applications.

Mr MAAS: Very innovative. Thank you, Minister. Again referring to your presentation, this time the graffiti prevention grants, would you be able to explain for the committee what the program does and how it is keeping communities safe?

Mr CARROLL: I certainly can. I think graffiti is an area that we as local members are confronted with regularly. The graffiti prevention grants program is a very important program because it also shows particularly young people that may be susceptible to buying spray paint, buying cans and using them for negligible benefit to the community that if they are actually gifted and talented, we are happy to work with the local council and indeed they should consider actually doing a mural. What we have found through the evidence is good murals—beautiful pieces of artwork—whether they be in laneways, in neighbourhoods, in communities or around train stations, have the respect of, you could say, taggers or graffitiists.

It is also a way of showing them that they could live a life of earning some wise money, rather than going through the criminal process—putting their minds to it, working with councils. I have seen some great projects where some of these people involved in graffiti or these artists, in particular, have done a mural on an apartment complex, and then it has actually become a regular engagement for them to come back, touch the mural up and keep it going, and it actually becomes a form of income.

So I have been very committed to highlighting the benefits of the graffiti removal program, above and beyond what it has been doing in the community to how it can also change some lives. To date we have seen 111 graffiti prevention initiatives amounting to \$3.2 million in 2015–16 and 20 projects supported in the recent 19–20 grant program. So it is working well. I think it has a lot of good support. The most recent one I saw was at Auburn Village in Hawthorn, which received \$30 000 for our program, and it was a great work by the local artists. But we have got a lot more to do, and I think all our electorates benefit from this program. I have certainly encouraged my local council to apply and to work with local traders. The local traders and the landlords love seeing this sort of stuff happening in their community because it brings people to the community.

It gives people a sense of pride in their community when, particularly, something is defaced or ugly, and then it has become a mural—and the respect and the way it draws some crowds is quite innovative and good. So I think we are very committed to this graffiti removal program.

Mr MAAS: There are some real, tangible benefits for the community, too. I take you now to the government's crime prevention reform agenda, and I refer you to budget paper 3, page 81, and the \$5 million to support the development of that agenda. Would you be able to talk through both the need for these reforms and what the reform agenda will look like?

Mr CARROLL: I certainly can. Thanks, Mr Maas. The government has got a strong record, whether it be the recruitment of Victoria Police or whether it be the reforms to bail sentencing and the unprecedented action on family violence. As a result of this hard work, we have continued to see the crime rate track in the direction we want it to, and youth offending being at 10-year lows. But at the same time, as I highlighted in my earlier presentation, we are seeing the biggest population boom in Victoria since the gold rush, and that is also having an impact on our criminal justice system.

So to provide some context of why this task force and this \$35 million investment is needed, in the 10 years to 30 June 2018 Victoria's prison population increased by 82 per cent—and as minister for corrections and youth justice I am very committed to stopping people entering youth justice or the adult correction system in the first place. I think there is a real opportunity in the work of the Ombudsman's report into the reintegration of prisoners, and the work of Jesuit Social Services—particularly the late Tony Vinson, with his groundbreaking report, *Dropping Off the Edge*—to have a very good look at targeted place-based investment and those wraparound services. We know about crime prevention; we have a dedicated portfolio for it. Above and beyond, it is about building the Education State, it is focusing on those first 1000 days of a child's life, it is implementing all the recommendations of the family violence royal commission and it is getting on with the job of the mental health royal commission. Essentially crime prevention, while I am the portfolio holder, is a whole-of-government approach, and I have got to say that, from the Attorney-General to the police minister to the Premier, I have great support amongst my cabinet colleagues to get on and do this agenda and look at the causes of crime and stop, essentially, the prison gatehouse being a turnstile; to really address it, work with families, put those wraparound services in and do what we can to stop people entering the system.

Mr RIORDAN: Thank you, Chair, for facilitating the now conclusion of my maiden voyage on PAEC. Minister, welcome back again, and your support staff.

Secretary, a question for you first-up. The reference is budget paper 3, page 267, but more specifically one of the minister's recent press releases headed 'Crime prevention grants to boost community safety' where he has announced an allocation of \$3 million for crime prevention grants. Could you tell us whether you have issued any of those grants to date, and, if so, what areas they have been given to?

Ms FALKINGHAM: I might ask Ms McKenzie to answer this question.

Ms McKENZIE: Sorry, Mr Riordan, could you refer to the budget paper? I just cannot find where it is.

Mr RIORDAN: The budget paper reference is dealing with crime prevention, but the specific question stems from the minister's press release on crime prevention community grants, where applications are open for \$3 million in crime prevention grants. I am wondering if any of those have been issued to community groups yet, and, if so, what types of—

Ms McKENZIE: Fantastic. So we have got current crime prevention grants open. Do you happen to know from the press release—the crime prevention program has the \$25 million investment over the four years?

Mr CARROLL: For public safety infrastructure?

Mr RIORDAN: Yes.

Ms McKENZIE: Is it the Public Safety Infrastructure Fund; is that the—

Mr RIORDAN: Yes, you can apply for up to \$250 000 to fund infrastructure—

Ms McKENZIE: Yes. The Public Safety Infrastructure Fund, absolutely.

Mr RIORDAN: So is the \$3 million just for this year?

Ms McKENZIE: Yes, that is right. So it is every year; they are annual.

Mr RIORDAN: And have you issued any of those grants?

Ms McKENZIE: No. So it is open at the moment—

Mr RIORDAN: It closes in August.

Ms McKENZIE: It does. That is right.

Mr RIORDAN: So there has been nothing issued for that yet.

Ms McKENZIE: No, that is right. It is a competitive process.

Mr RIORDAN: Have you had applications in?

Ms McKENZIE: Yes, we have. Those are open at the moment.

Mr RIORDAN: And typically what types of programs would you be looking at for that?

Ms McKENZIE: Public safety infrastructure grants, because they are some of the larger grant programs, are usually for bigger capital costs. So they are local council proponents usually, and usually for things like CCTV infrastructure. Public safety infrastructure grants can go to the infrastructure of CCTV but not for the operations. It also does a range of—

Mr RIORDAN: So it is for one-off capital investments?

Ms McKENZIE: One-off capital, yes. So really, as the minister was saying before, kind of CPTED investments for local councils, so streetscapes, amenities, vandal-proof things—

Mr RIORDAN: Okay. Making places safer.

Ms McKENZIE: Yes, exactly right.

Mr RIORDAN: Could you please provide a list of the name and amount received by local government for community safety that has been allocated in the last two years? Can you take it on notice?

Ms McKENZIE: Yes, happily. I will take it on notice.

Ms FALKINGHAM: I think that information is already actually on the public record. We are happy to provide it, though.

Mr RIORDAN: Minister, budget paper 3, pages 266 to 268, list a range of performance measures. Apart from community crime prevention grant payments properly acquitted, what other performance measures in this budget does your portfolio carry?

Mr CARROLL: Well, one of the important things about the crime prevention program is that it is reviewed regularly, and it is reviewed externally to government.

So the Australian Institute of Criminology report to government on the program, and they have been a strong supporter of the program. We will continue to put in place all the measures that we think are evidence based, and we will continue to make the investments to ensure this program operates as it does. As I said, when we came to office and I did my review myself of the program, I identified from talking to different experts and criminologists in the university sector some improvements that could be made, and essentially the Communities that Care program was developed in response to that, as well as more of a focus on the report *Dropping Off the Edge* and some of those disadvantaged communities. But as you would be aware, I remarked that the—

Mr RIORDAN: So there are no other performance measures?

Mr CARROLL: Well, the performance measures probably speak for themselves through the Crime Statistics Agency. The crime rates have continued to go down since we came to office—

Mr RIORDAN: But the amount of people going to prison is going up.

Mr CARROLL: and the youth offending is the lowest for decades. So I sort of let the external agencies do their work. But, Deputy Chair, I do give you some comfort that this program has been reviewed on multiple occasions and indeed the—

Mr RIORDAN: So how does the department see its success? What KPI for you would give you the best measure of success as to whether the investment you are making in infrastructure or other measures is actually delivering benefits to communities?

Mr CARROLL: Yes. Well, first and foremost the crime rate, the Crime Statistics Agency. But above and beyond that it is really—

Mr RIORDAN: So if communities are seeing a rise in crime rates, will they be communities that you will prioritise over other communities?

Mr CARROLL: We would look at all communities. The important area you identified—you spoke about communities—the local government sector and the chief executive officers that I meet with, I must say, above and beyond roads, rates and rubbish, are taking a real interest in crime prevention in their communities.

Mr RIORDAN: Just to clarify, though, if crime rates are one of the main measures, you are saying that you would not necessarily prioritise communities with abnormally high or increasing crime rates over other communities?

Mr CARROLL: So we have introduced a range of measures. I quoted Jesuit Social Services and some of those postcodes. We have targeted, place-based investments where we know some communities need support. Above and beyond that, though, we have now also for the first time introduced dedicated youth grants. I spoke before about the youth offending rate being at 10-year lows. You are seeing us tweaking a program to try and get the best measures and the best KPIs out of a \$25 million investment, but above and beyond that this budget put in \$5 million to set up a task force to then bring leaders and captains of industry, sport, media to look at—

Mr RIORDAN: So just as a one-off example in my own community, Colac Otway—

Mr CARROLL: Yes.

Mr RIORDAN: We have had the investment in CCTV—

Mr CARROLL: Sure.

Mr RIORDAN: but we have seen a 52 per cent increase in thefts in the main street, in retail thefts. So do you get that feedback to go, 'Hang on, we have made this investment. It's still not working'. Do you have other countermeasures that you can employ?

Mr CARROLL: Yes, we certainly do. I would like to know what the investment in local police has been in your area. You spoke about CCTV. So CCTV is a very good measure to capture crime on screen—

Mr RIORDAN: As you are not the minister for police, I will not hold you to account for the fact that you have a policy of not backfilling police officers in country towns.

Mr CARROLL: but it does not always prevent crime. It has been a very useful tool in the criminal justice process and at the core of the process of—

Mr RIORDAN: I guess, Minister, what I am asking is: you make the investment—

Mr CARROLL: You are talking about crime prevention. Often with CCTV we introduce other measures, and a bit like the deputy secretary said, it might be improved lighting in that strip. It might be other measures to bring the community back to the strip.

Mr RIORDAN: No, I guess what I am looking at is: you make the investment; do you do a follow-up? Do you do a follow-up to say, 'We've made this investment. Can we see a measured improvement in what we do?'.

Mr CARROLL: We do.

Mr RIORDAN: Do you do that follow-up?

Mr CARROLL: And we would have ongoing dialogue with Colac Otway shire.

The CHAIR: And just like that, unfortunately the Deputy Chair's time has expired.

Mr HIBBINS: I am happy to have a debate about the efficacy of CCTV as a crime prevention tool, and perhaps around just how effective it is.

Mr D O'BRIEN: You think it is not.

Mr HIBBINS: Indeed. But no, I will continue.

Mr RIORDAN: We should compare notes. It might be the only thing Colac has in common with Prahran.

Mr HIBBINS: That we have got CCTV?

The CHAIR: Mr Hibbins, do not get sucked into his vortex of wasting your time.

Mr D O'BRIEN: At least he got time, this time.

Mr HIBBINS: I just wanted to find out about this \$5 million, which I have seen is just for one year within the budget, for crime prevention, and the previous review into place-based crime prevention grants identified a number of shortcomings in terms of place-based grants, in terms of them being short-term, poorly targeted, with no evaluation of the programs. How are you ensuring that you are going to actually overcome those deficiencies, particularly given this is only funded for one year?

Mr CARROLL: Thanks, Mr Hibbins, for your question. Essentially this new crime prevention reform agenda has brought together some key leaders that have a real passion for working with communities in preventing crime. The task force is made up of people from Jesuit Social Services, VCOSS—the Victorian Council of Social Service—leaders from sport, youth justice and including the media. It is really about looking at how we can get better at crime prevention. I spoke about the \$25 million program. I recently sat down with the Reichstein Foundation and the Myer Foundation and we had a very good look at some place-based investments and overseas, and indeed previous Labor administrations have funded Lake Tyers, Wendouree West. What it all shows is that if you stay the course, particularly if you are prepared to invest for the long term in wraparound services and put the programs in place, particularly for disadvantaged communities that lead to crime, you can turn evidence around.

Mr HIBBINS: That leads to the main point about why this is only a one-year investment.

Mr CARROLL: Essentially it is one year to support the task force. So this is a very specific program of work. This is not a task force that is going to be there forever. We have charged the task force. I am chairing it. Essentially it is seven meetings over 12 months, and then let us work up a strategy to get better at crime prevention and let us look at world's best practice to do it in the state of Victoria.

Mr HIBBINS: But there are individual programs funded out of this \$5 million, aren't there?

Mr CARROLL: There are a range of programs funded out of that, but predominately this is about supporting the task force to look at different prototypes—what is working?—and to have a good look at some

of the work. The town of Bourke is a good example, in New South Wales. They are an Aboriginal-controlled organisation, Indigenous led, and have seen over, essentially, a five or six-year period more Indigenous young kids completing high school, more getting their drivers licence. Ceduna in South Australia is another good example—Red Cross backed. It is getting great results. We need to get this data. We need to get this analysis. We need to work out what works. We need to also work with what particular organisations external to government understand this and get this, to really focus on areas of need. I mean, in Victoria we used to have the neighbourhood renewal program once upon a time, which did some important, good work. That sort of program does not exist anymore, but I am looking at, at the moment, through this task force, what could be the next vehicle to have some dedicated placed-based targeted investments on crime prevention.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Minister. In fact, Mr Hibbins, I gave you 33 per cent additional time for that answer, such is the level of benevolence I feel at this point in time.

Minister, thank you for appearing before our committee today. The committee will follow up on any questions taken on notice in writing, and responses will be required within 10 working days of the committee's request.

The committee will now take an extended break of 7 minutes. We will reconvene at 6.15 p.m. I declare this hearing adjourned.

Witnesses withdrew.