

TRANSCRIPT

PUBLIC ACCOUNTS AND ESTIMATES COMMITTEE

Budget Estimates 2019–20 (Women)

Melbourne—Thursday, 13 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

Ms Gabrielle Williams, Minister for Women,

Ms Brigid Monagle, Deputy Secretary, Fairer Victoria, and

Ms Emily Lee-Ack, Chief Executive Officer, Office for Women, Department of Premier and Cabinet.

The CHAIR: 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. Shocking, I know, for some, but it is what we are doing. Its aim is to scrutinise public administration and finance to improve outcomes for the Victorian community, and I am very confident that we are meeting that lofty goal. The committee will now begin consideration of the portfolio of women.

I welcome the Minister for Women, the Honourable Gabrielle Williams, and officers from her department. I thank you all for appearing before us today. All evidence given is protected by the Parliamentary Committees Act. This means that it attracts parliamentary privilege and is protected from judicial review—that is the good part. Witnesses found, though, to be giving false or misleading evidence may be in contempt of Parliament and subject to penalty—that is the bad part.

Minister, I do invite you to make a very brief opening statement of no more than 10 minutes, followed by questions from our wonderful committee.

Ms WILLIAMS: Thank you, Chair, and again thank you to the committee for letting me talk to you about what we are doing in the women's portfolio, particularly our leadership on achieving gender equality.

Visual presentation.

Ms WILLIAMS: Gender equality has been a central priority for this government across all portfolios, not just the women's portfolio. I think it is important to note that at the outset. Not only are we supporting specific gender equality initiatives and reforms through *Safe and Strong*, which is Victoria's gender equality strategy, but we are working across a number of other portfolios from education to employment to health care to justice and others to ensure that gender equality is at the heart of what we do and is a normal part of our day-to-day business.

In four years we have taken significant steps towards achieving gender equality. Women's participation in the workforce is up, and since 2013 the gender pay gap in the Victorian public service has almost halved. More women have entered local government through the Victorian Local Governance Association's Local Women Leading Change campaign. We have delivered the Women in Transport program to encourage more women to enter and stay in the transport sector. The Change Our Game campaign, which I know is well loved by many members of Parliament, is challenging gender stereotypes in sport and encouraging more women and girls to participate in sport on the field but of course also in leadership positions in clubs across our community. We have delivered investments in women's health, including better access to sexual and reproductive health, by opening eight new community-based sexual and reproductive health hubs across Victoria. We have continued to implement every single one of the 227 recommendations of the Royal Commission into Family Violence, with more than half of those already acquitted.

In 2019–20 we will invest just under \$1.5 billion towards a range of gender equality initiatives in the areas of economic security, education, health and wellbeing, support for women's sport and of course ending family violence. These investments are in addition to our broader policies and programs dedicated to addressing disadvantage and discrimination.

In terms of economic security we have invested in subsidised three-year-old kinder and had free TAFE, which reduces the financial barriers to women accessing training and education, which we know has been significant. We have been helping even more jobseekers find work, with additional support through the Jobs Victoria Employment Network and the expansion of the jobs bank. We have got payroll tax exemptions to encourage employers to offer parental leave to both mothers and fathers.

In that sort of health and wellbeing space we are improving nurse-to-patient ratios and delivering over 540 nurses and midwives across Victoria to ensure that patients, including of course new mums, are getting the care that they deserve. We are making tampons and pads free and available in all government schools; establishing a dedicated maternal and child 24-hour phone line; planning for public IVF services and improved access for assisted reproductive services, something especially close to my heart; and continued support for the health and wellbeing of women living in our rural communities. That is through \$500 000 to the CWA to support their ongoing advocacy for health and wellbeing of women in rural communities, and what great work they have been doing.

In terms of support for women's sport, the upgrade to the State Basketball Centre and the plan for the Knox arena to cater for women's and also for mixed leagues; improvements to women's sporting venues; funding upgrades to community sporting infrastructure, including women's change rooms and facilities; providing greater opportunities for women to participate at all levels; encouraging women's and girls' involvement in motorsports and golf; and supporting the employment of four netball development officers to promote the game and provide support to those volunteers who are running grassroots competitions around the state. In terms of being free from violence, I will not go into that in any detail because I think I covered that significantly in our last allocated session in the family violence portfolio.

In terms of our women's portfolio overview, the women's portfolio is addressing structural barriers to gender equality, with a particular focus on increasing women's leadership across all sectors of Victoria's economy, across improving women's participation in work and obviously in improving financial security, including through reducing the gender pay gap and reducing the impact of gender inequality on vulnerable groups of women in particular.

In terms of implementing *Safe and Strong*, which is our first-ever gender equality strategy, it was introduced in 2016 and sets out a framework for enduring and sustained action over time, which we know is what is required. With this strategy we are progressively building the attitudinal and behavioural change required to reduce violence against women and also to deliver gender equality. The strategy draws on global evidence of what works in gender equality and sets out foundational reforms that lay the groundwork and set a new standard for action by the government. These reforms draw on all levers available to us, including obviously legislative changes, governance structures, employment practices, budget policy, procurement funding decisions and advocacy, of course, to the commonwealth government to do its bit as well. The strategy also considers six settings for whole-of-government action in which strategic alliances and partnerships will enable shared progress towards our ultimate goal of gender equality. Those areas include education and training, work and economic security, leadership and participation, health, safety and wellbeing, sport and recreation and of course media, arts and culture as well.

In terms of our key achievements, in 2018–19 our key achievements in delivering upon *Safe and Strong* included the release of an exposure draft of the gender equality bill, which is really a once-in-a-generation opportunity for us to address social norms and cultural expectations that we know drive gender inequality but at their most extreme end also lead to violence against women. We have completed the first-ever workplace gender audit in the VPS, identifying how well the public service is performing on things like pay equity and of course its drivers, such as women's leadership representation, the availability of flexible work and also organisational culture, which we know to be a key contributor. We have piloted a gender impact analysis framework in the public service as a basis to embed gender equality as a consideration across all portfolios, from finance to economic development to housing, mental health and of course skills. We surpassed our 50-50 representation of women in new appointments to paid government boards. We have reached 54 per cent of new appointments being women. That was as of March this year.

We have invested in community programs with young people and in sporting settings. Early results indicate that we are increasing people's confidence in calling out sexism and of course also in challenging harmful gender stereotypes. We have provided support for vulnerable women to develop small business skills as well and build their financial capacity, which we also know is incredibly important.

In 2019–20, as the slide outlines, we will be introducing that legislation for Australia's first gender equality bill, which I touched on before in referring to the release of the exposure draft. We will be improving workplace gender equality, including continuing that work and addressing the gender pay gap, obviously addressing the

impact of gender equality on diverse groups of women as well and of course continuing to implement our women on boards commitments, because we know that takes a sustained effort. In terms of our Respect Women: Call It Out campaign, many of you may be aware that Respect Victoria was established last year, in 2018, as a statutory authority, and we have invested \$3 million per annum ongoing for the establishment and operational resource of that agency and an additional \$24 million over four years committed to fund Respect Victoria's communication, their research and also their evaluation activities in the delivery of the *Free from Violence* strategy.

The Respect Women: Call It Out campaign has been incredibly successful so far, with the latest public transport bystander campaign showing that 50 per cent of Victorians over 18 have seen the campaign either through paid advertising or through the surrounding media, which I think is pretty remarkable; and I know feedback from phase 1 of the campaign demonstrated also a very significant reach in terms of those who had seen the campaign, but more importantly significant levels—really high levels—of understanding of the message that that campaign was promoting. The latest campaign, phase 2, which was the public transport setting campaign, ran across multiple media platforms, from free-to-air TV to catch-up TV, so from media, train stations, cinema screens and of course print as well. We were hoping to have the ability—is it working?—to play the latest ad for you.

The CHAIR: This is where the creepy guy is watching her.

Ms WILLIAMS: Yes, this is the one.

Video shown.

Ms VALLENCE: Have we got sound?

Ms WILLIAMS: You get the idea. Hopefully you have all seen it. Obviously there are some internal monologues going on throughout the course of the ad, which reveal the bystander's discomfort at seeing what is going on and he intervenes in a safe way, which is also a message that is important in that ad.

In Australia violence in intimate relationships contributes more to the disease burden for women aged 18 to 44 than any other risk factor, for example, smoking, alcohol use or being overweight, which is why in my previous contribution I talked about violence against women also being a public health issue.

Victoria's key prevention strategy, *Free from Violence*, was launched in May 2017, and \$50.8 million was invested over four years. This funding has been spent on key programs and initiatives to prevent violence against women. I think that neatly concludes the presentation.

Ms RICHARDS: Thank you, Minister. I appreciate your insights. Just taking you back to the gender equality strategy, *Safe and Strong*, and the recognition that women still face barriers to workforce equality and subsequent economic security, I refer you to budget paper 3, page 311. I would like you to outline for the committee how the Victorian budget delivers on the commitment the Andrews Labor government has made to Victorian women about improving gender equality, and I am specifically interested in the impact in Victorian workplaces.

Ms WILLIAMS: Thank you, Ms Richards. I know this is an issue that you have been very passionate about for some time and have been very active in the government in your time in this place raising and talking about wanting to see progress on, as so many have.

As I have outlined through the presentation, we are incredibly committed to achieving gender equality and also in doing that in workplaces, improving the economic security for women, which we know to be sadly behind the economic security that men often enjoy at virtually all stages of the career trajectory. We know that work and economic security are key factors where we really need to stimulate change in order for that gender equality to happen, where government itself has a key responsibility. It is one of the key settings outlined in *Safe and Strong*, Victoria's gender equality strategy, and an area in which we have invested very strongly over the last four years.

In 2019–20 we are investing \$26.3 million in women’s policy, and that is in budget paper 3, page 295, which includes the continued implementation of *Safe and Strong*, but also necessarily a number of programs and policies that support women to work but also improve the experience of women at work and as a consequence ensure the economic security of women by maintaining and holding their place in the workforce.

To achieve gender equality we really also need to close the gender pay gap. That is a really important part of this story in terms of gender equality in the workplace. We know that that is quite a complex area. It requires a multifaceted approach that enables women to be supported in secure work throughout the course of their career, so that is from point of entry all the way through to promotion and the availability of opportunities to them. We have invested in a diverse array of programs and policies to reduce those inequalities at work and to support workplaces to promote gender equality. We will continue to support these programs through base funding in 19–20. So we invested \$150 000 to complete the Victorian government’s first-ever workplace gender audit in 2018, and this audit identified many of the key drivers of the pay gap, such as women’s leadership representation, flexible work or availability of flexible work, organisational culture, and that struggle to return from parental leave, which many are familiar with.

We also invested a little bit over \$278 000 to provide career support for parents to help them navigate pregnancy, parental leave and of course that process of return to work. Last year the Office of Women commenced the rollout of an online career support service for parents across four public sector organisations. We are also investing \$2.2 million in programs to support older women but also women with a disability, women from Aboriginal communities and women from culturally diverse backgrounds to increase their financial security and capability as well. In addition to this we have invested \$1.2 million towards Stepping Stones, which is a microenterprise program delivered by the Brotherhood of St Laurence, which supports women to become more financially confident and secure. We have also invested \$1 million for a financial capability program, which is delivered by the Women’s Information and Referral Exchange, which you might better recognise as WIRE, and also with Good Shepherd, which targets women from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds as well as women with a disability and Aboriginal women. So our work in this space has been quite diverse and targeted where it needs to be but I think informed by our understanding of the complexities of the challenge of gender equality in workplaces.

Ms RICHARDS: Thank you, Minister. I am staying in this area of workforce. I am interested in what else the budget does to increase the participation of women in the workforce and how we are travelling there.

Ms WILLIAMS: Thank you, Ms Richards. As you will be more than aware the challenges of participation really do require a strategic, indeed a whole-of-government, approach which reaches into all the corners of a woman’s working life. That is why I am really proud that my colleagues in adjacent portfolios have invested strongly in these areas as well for the last four years but indeed also this year as well.

So the Victorian budget in 19–20 invests \$976 million to ensure that more women achieve economic security, including through our \$882 million to ensure that every three-year-old has access to subsidised kinder by 2022—our universal three-year-old kinder commitment—which we know will assist more women and families with the cost of kinder but also assist in the ability for women to return to the workforce. Of course we know that that ability to return to the workforce has a really profound long-term effect for career progression, obviously, but also for superannuation and for retirement benefits, which is one thing that comes up repeatedly and I know is something that many of our constituents will raise with us.

We have also invested \$57 million to ensure our TAFE system is the best it has ever been and that all Victorian women have access to high-quality training. I alluded in my presentation to the importance of free TAFE in removing some of the barriers for women, particularly caregivers, in accessing the training they may need to re-enter the workforce.

Previous initiatives remain ongoing, such as our \$98.4 million to fund kindergarten initiatives to help improve educational outcomes for girls. So again it is a holistic approach, making sure that we are looking at this issue from a cradle to grave perspective. We have also got a \$28.6 million expansion of tech schools, including offering tailored programs targeting female students to encourage increased participation in areas that have been traditionally regarded as male-dominated—physics, IT, specialist maths—because we know that in reality

there is no reason why these areas should be regarded as male dominated at all. It is often through lack of encouragement or overcoming some of those confidence barriers.

Interestingly, Australia has the highest educational attainment of women in the world, yet we are still lagging behind in gender equality more broadly due to low labour force participation. In part this is attributable to the bias and discrimination that women still encounter in the workforce and in the workplace. This budget again has put forward a really strong investment to put in place measures to ensure that Victorian women can work in a secure job of their choice and with the appropriate support and training they need that pays and treats them fairly and of course equally and ensures economic security in the long term. I think we are continuing that work with strength and in earnest, and we are confident that if we can sustain this focus we will start to see the experienced women in the workplace and indeed the inequality that we know exists, whether it be the pay gap or whether it be in retirement outcomes, we will start to see that close.

Ms RICHARDS: Which is a good segue to move from the importance of participation—you have acquitted that well—but then once people get into the workplace I am interested in finding out how the investment will improve gender equality once in a workplace in Victoria.

Ms WILLIAMS: Thank you again for that question. Look, we know that more than half of working women are effectively likely to face some kind of gender discrimination or indeed workplace violence or sexual harassment, which is an astonishing figure and one I know would horrify all at this table. We know that casual sexism and unconscious bias is also unacceptably common and we know that to ensure the economic security of women we must ensure that we are supporting safe and respectful workplaces in addition to that work that I alluded to in my previous response around more equal approaches to pay and career opportunity and progression and all those things.

So from a government perspective this means that we need to support employers and workplaces to implement policies and procedures which effectively support inclusive and respectful workplaces but also that help support employers become model employers when it comes to gender equality. So the \$26.3 million that is invested in women's policy in 2019–20 will enable our government to continue to implement the frameworks that are set out in *Safe and Strong*. *Safe and Strong* really is a mandate for governments, for businesses, for the not-for-profit sector, to improve outcomes for all women, including at work. We are working with WorkSafe to address gender violence in the workplace, which is a really exciting approach to take. We are also funding scholarships to support young and emerging female leaders, and we also fund the Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission to develop a program called Raise It!, which simulates workplace conversations about discrimination and how to avoid it, with a particular focus on preventing sexual harassment in the workplace and also with a focus on flexible leave and parental leave entitlements as well.

So again it is quite a broad piece of work—initiatives—working to challenge, I suppose, a culture that often exists in workplaces, knowing full well that cultural change takes time but that you have to tackle it at its root, and that is really where a lot of this work has been focused.

Ms RICHARDS: Thank you, Minister. I would actually like to move on to an area that probably links your previous role as Parliamentary Secretary for Health with your current ministerial responsibilities. I refer you to budget paper 3, page 311, and I am interested in taking the opportunity for you to outline to the committee how the budget delivers on the commitment the Andrews Labor government made to Victorian women about improving gender equality in health, safety and wellbeing for women.

Ms WILLIAMS: Could you please repeat that last bit again, sorry—the last bit?

Ms RICHARDS: How you are improving gender equality for health, safety and wellbeing for women—so it is the health and wellbeing element that I am particularly interested in hearing about.

Ms WILLIAMS: Sure. Thank you for that question, and I know the health and wellbeing space is also an area that is very close to your heart from your previous employment before being elected. The Andrews government is committed to addressing gendered health inequality as we know that gender impacts health and wellbeing outcomes. We know that women are two to three time more likely to experience, for example, mental health problems like depression and anxiety, particularly when compared with men, and that harmful

stereotypes about gender, about sexuality and about body image play a really significant part in that. I have already spoken quite a lot about the gender pay gap and inequality at work that puts women at a higher risk of physical and mental illness as well as, sadly, homelessness later in life, which is another area in the women's space that is often discussed. And of course we know that gendered violence and harassment affect how and when women use and access public services and how women move through and experience public spaces, which is a very important topic, I think, for discussion in this policy area.

Without doubt gendered norms and stereotypes have a very real, meaningful and, sadly, harmful consequence in terms of health outcomes for women but indeed for everyone. For example, notions of masculinity—we often talk about this in the context of women, but it is also important, I think, that we focus on notions of masculinity, of strength, of bravery—meaning that men are more likely to engage in risk-taking behaviours as well and they are also less likely to do things like go to the doctor or seek help when they need it. Our government is really committed to improving health outcomes for the whole community.

We are also committed to reducing gendered health inequalities. To outline a few ways that we are doing that—for example, in sport a key component of reducing gendered health inequality is actually getting more women and girls involved in sport. It is a really important part of Victorian culture—we know that—and indeed Australian culture. But more than that, in addition to the fact that sport is something that is such a huge part of our day-to-day lives and culture here in Australia it is also, because of that, a really powerful vehicle for social change. That is why we identified sport as a key focus in *Safe and Strong*. With a visible and valued presence, sport really does have the capacity to challenge gender stereotypes and discriminatory attitudes and to promote important values of fairness and respect, but we also know that it can change the way that communities view women and girls and also—perhaps more importantly—change the way that women and girls see themselves, which we know has been an obstacle. Seeing more women participating in sport really does, I think, help promote that culture of respect and fairness, and we have certainly seen that in recent times with the growth and popularity of AFLW and some of the superstars that have emerged out of that code.

But being active is really important, we know, for good mental and physical health. This is especially true for women, who are more likely to suffer from depression, low self-esteem and body image issues, as I have outlined. So the \$26.3 million investment in women's policy will ensure that women and girls continue to be supported in programs that enrich their health and wellbeing, so that we can effectively assist everyone to lead those happy, healthy, productive lives that it is ultimately our goal to promote. And while sport and health are the portfolio responsibilities of my colleagues and are very aptly taken care of by my colleagues, the wellbeing of women is really a key tenet of reducing gender inequality and requires, I think, that strategic whole-of-government approach, which is why it is so wonderful to see some additional investment in those areas in line with the priorities that we have been able to spearhead out of the women's portfolio.

Our government is investing \$115 million to support and promote women's participation in sport—of course through my colleague the Minister for Sport—but we are also investing \$98.8 million for initiatives addressing maternal and reproductive health, which we also know to be incredibly important, and \$20.7 million to make tampons and pads free and available in all government schools, which again has been such a valuable reform in our local communities and one I know that I received incredible feedback about from my local community. Particularly when you are dealing with communities where there might be levels of disadvantage, you cannot always assume that girls get access to tampons and pads as they should and deserve to. And also \$500 000 to support the Country Women's Association and its ongoing advocacy for the health and wellbeing of women living in our rural and regional communities in particular.

We are wholly committed to supporting programs which improve women's health and wellbeing. It is really important that we see that as a whole-of-government responsibility through a number of different portfolios, and while, through the women's portfolio, we might set the direction for where the priorities should be and where issues are that need to be overcome, it is wonderful to see demonstrated in this budget a whole-of-government commitment and indeed response to that prioritisation.

Ms RICHARDS: Minister, staying in health and wellbeing, I am interested in how the government's investment has boosted health and wellbeing in Victorian women and girls.

Ms WILLIAMS: Thank you very much for your question again, as you gulp down a glass of water. Working off that previous answer to the question that you asked, we know that women experience a number of health inequalities, and unfortunately health issues unique to women have long been, I suppose, dismissed as either unimportant, minor or just things that you do not talk about. But we know that investment in sexual and reproductive health services in particular are one of the most cost-effective health interventions that we can make for women. Our investment commits to increasing access to best practice prevention, and also, though, to best practice diagnosis, early intervention and treatment services. In 2017 you may be aware that the Andrews government released the women's sexual and reproductive health plan. I am sure you will be aware of that.

Ms RICHARDS: Absolutely.

Ms WILLIAMS: It is a five-year plan to improve women's health and wellbeing but also to strengthen partnerships between women consumers and also services. As part of that we invested \$6.6 million over four years to implement that plan. Key achievements under that plan—and they may be familiar to some of you—include the 1800 My Options website and the phone line that goes with it, which is essentially an information service on women's contraceptive, pregnancy and sexual health options across Victoria and which I am proud to say received its 5000th caller in May of this year. The uptake of that service, I think, has been really strong, which tells us we are on the right track in providing a service that Victorians genuinely need. They have demonstrated that through their uptake of that service.

Also, in terms of achievements under that plan, there have been eight new community-based sexual and reproductive health hubs across Victoria, with the latest hubs to be opened in Ringwood and in Gippsland. We have got the provision of funding to Sunraysia community health in Mildura to strengthen and promote primary prevention strategies and increase access to sexual health services.

Of course the opening of the refurbished Melbourne-based Family Planning Victoria clinic in late 2017 enabled women of all ages to access family planning services at the Melbourne central business district and the Box Hill clinic as well. We have opened Victoria's first polycystic ovary syndrome clinic at the Monash Medical Centre in Clayton, which is a wonderful initiative and long overdue for anybody who is familiar with PCOS and the sad lack of attention that has occurred over such a long period of time. As a result of that lack of attention there has been a lack of understanding about its impacts, both immediate and long term. There has been some incredibly important investment go into those spaces.

Finally, in talking about health and wellbeing, I have to again talk about family violence. You cannot talk about women's health and wellbeing without talking about preventing family violence and indeed preventing all forms of violence against women. I mentioned earlier that in Australia family violence is the number one contributor to the burden of disease for women aged between 18 and 44, which is pretty startling. To drive that home again, it is more than any other risk factor: it is more than smoking, it is more than alcohol, it is more than being overweight. When you put that in perspective it really does show us just how significant an issue this is to women's health and wellbeing, but also to reflect on the fact that it is a preventable burden. It need not be this way.

From 15–16 to the 20–21 period the Victorian government has committed just shy of \$110 million for the primary prevention of family violence and all forms violence against women because we know that when we prevent violence against women, we are also in turn improving the health and wellbeing of women, whether they be at home, at school, at work or indeed in public spaces, as I have spoken about previously. No greater investment, I think, will deliver on women's health and wellbeing than our commitment to a Victoria free from violence.

Ms RICHARDS: Thank you, Minister. I am not sure how much time I have left.

The CHAIR: You have 13 seconds.

Ms RICHARDS: I was going to say I know you know how to kick a footy, and I was going to quickly take you to sport and rec, but perhaps with only a few seconds left I can take this conversation with you offline.

Ms VALLENCE: Thank you, Minister and officers, and I also do not mind having a kick of the footy. Minister, I refer you to budget paper 3, page 311, and in the table of performance measures the third measure

relates to the percentage of women on public boards—that measure being 50 per cent. Can you tell me as a percentage figure of all government public boards how many are complying with this target?

Ms WILLIAMS: Okay. As I touched on before, in terms of new appointments for women on government boards we have hit 54 per cent of new appointments on government boards being women.

Ms VALLENCE: No, not new appointments, but of boards overall.

Ms WILLIAMS: Sure. I might hand over on the detail of the overall to Brigid, who might have that figure to hand. Just bear with us.

Ms MONAGLE: Just give me a second.

Ms VALLENCE: We can take that on notice, Minister. Yes, take that on notice.

Ms WILLIAMS: Actually I think we may have that figure to hand. I have seen it. If you just bear with us.

Ms VALLENCE: I am just conscious of time. We have a lot of questions we would like to ask.

Ms WILLIAMS: Fifty-three per cent.

Ms VALLENCE: Fifty-three per cent of all boards.

Ms MONAGLE: Paid boards.

Ms WILLIAMS: Paid boards.

Ms VALLENCE: Of all paid boards. Okay. Are you familiar with the Building Industry Consultative Council?

Ms WILLIAMS: Yes. I am aware of it. It does not fall within my area of portfolio responsibility.

Ms VALLENCE: In terms of budget paper 3, page 311, and having appointments to paid boards, are you aware that women only make up 17 per cent of that council—not even a quarter?

Ms WILLIAMS: Again I would say in terms of the specifics of that board that you are referring to, while we have, in the women's portfolio, an interest or a carriage of the overall objective to have equal representation of women on paid government boards, in terms of the specifics of a board that does not fall within my direct responsibility you are probably best to direct questions about that specific board to, I believe, the Treasurer, who has responsibility—

Ms VALLENCE: But it is your output measure, isn't it—the responsibility of 50 per cent women on boards? On that particular board less than one-quarter of the board members are women.

Ms WILLIAMS: The minister with the responsibility for—

Ms VALLENCE: What have you done to address the gender imbalance on that board?

Ms WILLIAMS: I think you would find that—I believe I am correct—that particular board falls within the responsibility of the Treasurer, and so in terms of appointments made to that board your question is best directed to the Treasurer, who would ultimately have responsibility for appointments to that board.

Ms VALLENCE: It is your output measure though, isn't it, Minister? It is in the budget papers quite clearly, in black and white. It is your output measure to have 50 per cent women on boards.

Ms WILLIAMS: Again, I would direct you to the Treasurer for that specific board. We obviously keep a clear track of how we are trending across all paid government boards, and I am very proud to be able to say we have got that 53 per cent figure of women across paid government boards.

Ms VALLENCE: Well, you do not because on this board, which has paid positions on the board, less than a quarter of the members of this board are women. So my question was: obviously I had asked you what you had done to address the gender imbalance on that board.

Ms WILLIAMS: Again, I will pass to my colleague Ms Monagle, who I believe may want to add some detail to this. But I would again say our output measure relates to the commitment we made to ensuring that there was equal representation of women across paid government boards. I have been very proud to be able to report back that 53 per cent overall and 54 per cent—

Ms VALLENCE: Does that mean then that some boards might have more and if this board, for example, has less than a quarter of women—

Ms WILLIAMS: I am happy to pass on to Ms Monagle to add any detail to that.

Ms VALLENCE: No, it is okay. I think we have got the answer. Nothing has been done to address the gender imbalance on that board.

Ms WILLIAMS: No. Ms Monagle, I would have to correct you on that because that would be a mischaracterisation of my response.

Ms VALLENCE: The other Bridget.

Ms WILLIAMS: Oh, Ms Vallence, sorry. But I would have to correct that because that would be a mischaracterisation. I have explained where our commitment lies in terms of representation across paid government boards and the fact that you are asking a very specific question about a very specific board which falls under the portfolio responsibility of the Treasurer, and therefore you should direct that question to the Treasurer about appointments made to that specific board.

Ms VALLENCE: Well, Minister, with respect, I think a lot of the boards would fall under many portfolio areas, and as you have said—and in budget paper 3, page 311—supporting women is the responsibility of your portfolio and many of the boards will be falling in lots of different portfolios.

Ms WILLIAMS: It is a whole-of-government responsibility.

Ms VALLENCE: Whole-of-government approach, and so in this case that board is a government board. Minister, on what date did you first become aware that one of the appointees to this government board was facing charges of harassment of a woman and breaching family violence orders, and subsequently on what date did you find out that they would be indicating a guilty plea?

Ms WILLIAMS: Again I would have to question—and I will seek advice from the Chair on this—whether that is actually a question that fairly relates to the material.

Ms VALLENCE: It does. I am referring to this as a board—on budget paper 3, page 311—it is your responsibility in terms of the representation on those boards. It relates to your portfolio—the whole-of-government portfolio of supporting women. It is written in there. Right at the top it is written, above your output measures.

The CHAIR: Minister, you have already provided a response, and I am not sure that there is anything to be gained by engaging any further with this line of questioning, unless of course you choose to do so.

Ms WILLIAMS: No. Thank you, Chair. I am more than happy to talk you through the government's appointment and remuneration guidelines that set out some of the processes that go into appointments for boards—

Ms VALLENCE: Yes, and I notice that on page—

Ms WILLIAMS: And talk you through how that happens, and I am sure my colleagues Ms Monagle and Ms Lee-Ack could probably talk you through the detail of that as well.

Ms VALLENCE: I am familiar with the appointment and remuneration guidelines.

Ms WILLIAMS: But in addition to that, given the comments I have previously made, you are actually asking me a question that relates to a question outside of my portfolio responsibilities.

Ms VALLENCE: Minister, you have been completely silent when it has come to John Setka being appointed—

Ms WILLIAMS: I would love to help you, but you are asking about a board that sits within a different portfolio responsibility.

Ms VALLENCE: You have been completely silent, but it is about a board member on a board that has less than a quarter of women on that board. Less than a quarter of women are on that board.

The CHAIR: Ms Vallence, you are asking a question about a board that the minister has told you she has no direct responsibility for, so either ask a question about a board that she does or move on.

Ms VALLENCE: I am asking about the board in relation to the fact that there are less than 50 per cent of women on that board.

The CHAIR: The minister has responded and told you repeated—

Ms VALLENCE: Chair, with respect—

The CHAIR: No, there is no respect in what you are saying, only disrespect. So let me correct you: the minister has already told you—

Ms VALLENCE: I am saying this on behalf of women who are concerned—

The CHAIR: She has no portfolio responsibility over the board of which you have asked. Please move along.

Ms VALLENCE: I am asking, Chair, on behalf of women who are very concerned that this government stands by someone who has—

The CHAIR: The minister has advised you very clearly that on this board, she has no responsibility for it. If you continue to speak over me, I will continue to mute your microphone. Now, please, either move on or ask a question that is relevant to the minister's portfolio.

Ms VALLENCE: Thank you, Chair. In terms of your *Safe and Strong: A Victorian Gender Equality Strategy*, one of those drivers of violence against women includes around the condoning of violence against women, I ask you: why didn't you call for John Setka to be sacked as a government appointee responsibility, given involvement developing the women in construction strategy?

Ms WILLIAMS: Sorry, can you repeat what the actual question in that was?

Ms VALLENCE: Yes, the question was: why didn't you call for John Setka to be sacked as a government appointee, given his involvement in a government board that develops a women in construction strategy, noting that in your *Safe and Strong: A Victorian Gender Equality Strategy*, that includes quite expressly that one of the drivers of violence against women includes condoning violence against women, and that we should call it out?

Ms WILLIAMS: I thank you for your comments on this, and in line with what is appropriate, given that the matters that you are essentially referring to that sit behind that question are essentially matters that are currently before a court, it would be wildly unwise—

Ms VALLENCE: The court case seems a weak excuse for not sacking Setka—on a paid government board.

Ms WILLIAMS: No, it would be wildly unwise for me to offer—

Ms VALLENCE: If you want to take down that line, one of your colleagues, Mr Somyurek, was stood down during an investigation in which he bullied a woman and was then sacked, and yet why haven't you advocated for John Setka to also be stood down in the same vein?

Ms WILLIAMS: Again because there is a key differentiating factor in the examples you are giving me, which is that the matter you are trying to get me to comment on is a matter that is currently before the courts and it would be very unwise for me to offer any commentary on a matter that is before the courts. It is common practice not to comment on matters that currently sit before the court, and I have no intention of doing so.

Ms VALLENCE: But the Premier himself has moved to stand down John Setka many, many weeks after this was raised—in fact since October, the charges of harassment against Mr Setka were in October last year. We knew many, many weeks ago that he was pleading guilty to those charges. Your government—is it really that it is one rule for union bosses and a different rule for everyone else?

The CHAIR: Well, with respect, the Premier is not here today, and the Premier has also made very clear, if you wish to quote him, that he has made that move in relation to the comments in regard to Ms Batty and it has nothing to do with the charges before the courts at the moment.

Members interjecting.

The CHAIR: Well, you might like to split hairs.

Mr RIORDAN: We have a Minister for Women who does not seem to want to stand up for women.

Ms VALLENCE: As a woman to a woman, I think this is very concerning—that this government stands by this kind of behaviour on the one hand with a union boss and not on the other hand. I refer to your presentation—in fact you have a taxpayer-dollar advertising campaign to call it out. It is on the TV. You could have cast John Setka in that role, but probably he was not available. Also in your strategy Free from Violence—you are spending money on Free from Violence and you point out that one in three women are experiencing physical violence. This person is saying that they are pleading guilty to harassing a woman and breaching a court order. It is a lame excuse to say that it is before the courts, because your government has acted in this vein before with Mr Somyurek. What do you say to that?

Ms WILLIAMS: I say to you: I can only repeat what I have already said to you, Ms Vallenge, which is that you are referring to matters which are currently before the courts.

Ms VALLENCE: That is a lame excuse.

Ms WILLIAMS: No. You are referring to matters which are currently before the courts. It is not a lame excuse; it is common practice and it is common practice for a reason, because it would be highly inappropriate for me to intervene in a matter that needs to go before a court, that rightly is going before a court and we need to see through those—

Ms VALLENCE: Okay. You said that the Premier has made statements in relation to Rosie Batty. So after comments in relation to a survivor of family violence, it was okay for this move to be taken, but not after the multiple charges against Mr Setka. You have said, and your Premier and your government have said, that the standard you accept is the standard you walk past. What do you say to that, Minister?

The CHAIR: The standard you walk past is the standard you accept, but I think everyone understood.

Ms WILLIAMS: I think the Chair adequately made the differentiation earlier. You are specifically raising with me matters that are currently before a court. If you seek to raise matters about commentary that was run over the weekend, the Premier and others have made remarks—

Ms VALLENCE: Have you met with Mr Setka about this?

Ms WILLIAMS: about the importance of Rosie Batty in our reform, the fact that we certainly do not tolerate any negative commentary about her contribution to that reform but also as a great Victorian, who has

put herself through an enormous amount of trauma in trying to make sure that no other Victorian has to ever experience what she did. I hugely value the work of Rosie Batty.

Ms VALLENCE: Yes. I think that is not disputed whatsoever.

Ms WILLIAMS: I am hugely pleased that she was awarded for that work on Monday in the Queen's Birthday Honours—

Ms VALLENCE: Not disputed whatsoever. Not disputed. Minister, I am just conscious of time.

Ms WILLIAMS: and I will stand against anyone who dares to criticise Rosie Batty or the contribution that she has made to the state of Victoria or indeed Australia or indeed to the global discussion that is currently happening about violence against women.

Ms VALLENCE: Okay. Well, on that basis then, given that those comments were made about Rosie Batty, why did it take the Treasurer and not you as Minister for Women to finally seek the removal of John Setka from a paid government board?

Ms WILLIAMS: Because the Treasurer is the responsible minister for that board, as I outlined in my previous response.

Ms VALLENCE: Given that Mr Setka's charges of harassment relate to women and that he has been sitting on a board, his charges of harassment against women were dating back to October, a period when your paid government board on which he sits had commenced work on the Women in Construction strategy, will that strategy now be dismissed given that one of the appointees is set to plead guilty to charges of harassing a woman?

Ms WILLIAMS: I do not think I can add anything further than what I have already said to the number of other streams of questioning that you have raised.

Ms VALLENCE: Will that strategy on women be dismissed?

Ms WILLIAMS: I am happy to get one of my colleagues to give more details about the level of consultation that went into—

Ms VALLENCE: If the strategy is not dismissed and it is relating to women, which is your portfolio, will you support that strategy?

Ms WILLIAMS: From what I picked up from your question—I am happy to be corrected on this—you were asking whether a strategy as a whole should be dismissed? Is that where the question was?

Ms VALLENCE: The strategy itself. So Mr Setka, as a paid member of a government board—

The CHAIR: Ms Vallence, your time has expired.

Ms VALLENCE: Can you take that on notice.

Mr HIBBINS: Thank you, Minister, and team for appearing. I would just like to start off by asking about the time lines of the gender equality bill you referred to in your presentation. From what I am reading, the original time lines for that bill were that it would be proposed to be passed through Parliament in May 2019 and the summary of the report of the gender equality consultations would be by February 2019, introduced into Parliament in March 2019. I am just wondering what the time line now is for those particular milestones and what the reason for the delay is.

Ms WILLIAMS: Thank you, Mr Hibbins. I know the gender equality bill has been a source of interest to you so thank you for asking about it. The time lines now for the bill are that we hope to have it introduced or we will have it introduced by the end of the year. The consultation process around the bill has been extensive and there was a significant process of consultation that was undertaken towards the end of last year. There has been further consultation that has been undertaken throughout the start of this year. We really want to make sure we

get this right. It is such a golden opportunity, I think, for us to be able to enshrine a set of standards, guidelines, but essentially mechanisms for accountability. Getting that right and making sure that that is crafted in the best possible way has taken that bit of time and extra consultation. So that work is well underway and it should be entering the Parliament later this year.

Mr HIBBINS: Will the delay affect any of the proposed implementation dates? I think at the start it was going to be 2020 where it would take effect for large government departments and then other implementations in 2021 and 2022. Is that still on track?

Ms WILLIAMS: I might refer to my colleague Ms Lee-Ack on some of the details about the timing of that. I will pass to Ms Lee-Ack.

Ms LEE-ACK: So the gender equality bill will require VPS and local government to establish and transparently report on gender equality action plans, and identify and require annual reporting on strategies to promote workplace gender equality. It is not anticipated that there will be a significant shift in the implementation at this stage.

Mr HIBBINS: Not significant, but a shift?

Ms LEE-ACK: No, the time lines have not shifted.

Mr HIBBINS: Okay. All right.

Ms WILLIAMS: We are happy to have those discussions with you. As the bill gets upon that time where it is entering the Parliament, I am sure those discussions will be had with you about what the time lines are for the forward processing of that bill.

Mr HIBBINS: Yes. I am just wondering whether they still match up with the time lines that have already been published.

Ms WILLIAMS: Sorry?

Ms MONAGLE: They largely do still match up, but what we need to look at very closely as part of the development is how the plans affect particular organisations, and then we will work with them individually in requirement to how then things roll out, depending on how ready they are for what is required of them.

Ms WILLIAMS: And that is in recognition of the fact that the bill obviously impacts quite a significant breadth and types of workforces. And so part of that consultation process that we have been undertaking is really to get a sense of what kind of support different workplaces will need in order to be able to meet the requirements that would be included in a gender equality bill to ensure that, in addition to obviously placing on them expectations and responsibility, we are also able to adequately put in place the supports to ensure that we are meeting our targets. We are interested in outcomes through this legislation and actually seeing real change as opposed to, you know, putting in responsibilities and then not assisting with the delivery of those responsibilities. So there has been a significant body of work in that.

Mr HIBBINS: My final question, and again this might not necessarily relate specifically to your direct oversight and portfolio responsibilities, but just picking up on your statements that you are trying to set the lead amongst all of our portfolios and government departments, and it relates to the safety of women under psychiatric care or in mental health inpatient units. I think there was a report last year by the mental health complaints commissioner, and various statistics released over the years about the significant number of assaults and harassment that very vulnerable women are facing under state care in psychiatric units, and there was a recommendation of a comprehensive sexual safety strategy for Victorian acute mental health inpatient units. Is that sexual safety strategy being developed?

Ms WILLIAMS: I think that might be a question better directed to my colleague, the Minister for Mental Health.

Mr HIBBINS: I appreciate that. If there is anything—

Ms WILLIAMS: Given the context in which your question is being framed and obviously its relationship to psychiatric facilities, that would be a question more appropriately directed to the Minister for Mental Health.

Mr HIBBINS: Okay. Well, that is all for me. No more further questions, Chair.

The CHAIR: That is very good of you. Thank you, Mr Hibbins. I thank the minister for appearing before us for the portfolio of women. 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. I declare this hearing adjourned.

Witnesses withdrew.