

**PARLIAMENT OF VICTORIA**

**YMCA YOUTH PARLIAMENT 2023**

**LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY CHAMBER**

Thursday 29 June 2023

2023 Youth Governor: Miora Trainor

Program Director: Tessa Buchanan

**Boroondara Youth**

Sophie Chen  
Madeleine Driscoll  
Sabina Koch  
Rachel Lou

**Buloke-Loddon Youth Parliament**

Julia Hunt  
Lennon Jablonka  
Molly Meadows  
Verity Orme  
Jasmine Twigg

**City of Greater Bendigo**

Lilly Correll  
Yuwaluxshayan Kannan  
Maxwell McKellar  
Ryan Peterson

**Daylesford College**

Beth Cochrane  
Evelyn Douglas  
Sabrina Horne  
Scout Kinnear  
Quinn Le Fevre

**Hoppers Crossing  
Secondary College**

Natasha Corluka  
Ineka Leffler  
Maddison Roberts-Castano  
Syazwani Saifudin  
Zariah Webb

**Ivanhoe Girls Grammar School**

Caitlin Burns  
Jamie Campbell  
Helix Hamilton  
Estella James  
Matilda Seckold  
Alice Tilson

**Pasefika Navigators**

Kyla-Michelle Anderson  
Dimithri Wickramaratne

**Wellington Shire Council**

Nicole Danks  
Flora Gillies  
Kaidance Green  
Charlotte Mansfield  
Zaralee McAuliffe-Douthat  
Jarrah Parr

**Wyndham City Council**

Raidah Parvez  
Krushnadevsinh Ravalji  
Hugo Nawat Somboonsin  
Asha Surujpal  
Ma Nicole Faith Bagatsing

**Y Geelong**

Ruby-Rose Braddock  
Jack Dumble  
Chase McIntosh  
Angelo von Möller

### *Opening of the session*

**The ACTING SPEAKER (Kaitlin Woolford) took the chair at 9:31 am.**

**The ACTING SPEAKER:** Good morning, everybody. I would like to call on the honourable Youth Premier.

**Krushnadevsinh RAVALJI:** Could I please request permission for jackets to be taken off.

**The ACTING SPEAKER:** Permission granted.

### *Bills*

#### **Increasing Public Safety in Regional and Rural Areas Bill 2023**

**Sponsor:** City of Greater Bendigo

**Refuter:** Ivanhoe Girls Grammar School

#### *Introduction and first reading*

**Lilly CORRELL:** I move:

To introduce a bill titled Increasing Public Safety in Regional and Rural Areas Bill 2023.

**Motion agreed to.**

**Read first time.**

#### *Second reading*

**Lilly CORRELL:** I move:

That the bill be now read a second time.

I would like to issue a trigger warning for public safety concerns, including substance abuse, family and domestic violence, mental health and homelessness. If you would like to leave the house, now is your time to do so.

Acting Speaker, members of the house, we all want to feel safer in our communities. Importantly, safety is a key part of what an inclusive community feels like: welcoming, hospitable and, most importantly, safe. Yet in our regional and rural communities there is an eruption of public safety concerns. Our regions face unique problems compared to metropolitan Melbourne. They often face systemic struggles that must be addressed to combat issues that span our generations in our most remote areas. This is why passing the bill, Increasing Public Safety in Regional and Rural Areas, is imperative. It creates a pathway that ensures everyone in our community not only feels safe but is empowered to make the most of life's opportunities. There are three key concerns the bill addresses: structural reform of community safety sectors, such as police and infrastructure; creating community safety support systems focusing on outreach and prevention rather than reactive measures; and educating our regions on community safety.

We identified the importance of addressing these issues through our own experiences. We asked our peers, mentors and educators in the regional city of Greater Bendigo if they had either felt unsafe before in the regional and rural areas, encountered a serious public safety hazard or had friends and family that were affected by public safety or a lack thereof. Every participant said yes. Results were frightening. What about the girls in our home town that ended up in hospital needing their stomachs to be pumped after being spiked on a night out? What about the homeless people, the people sleeping rough on our streets, that are stuck in a vicious cycle of abuse and neglect? What about the fear that our young people are feeling stepping onto public transport waiting for a mountain of abuse? Parents are scared. Children are scared. Children are not playing in streets anymore. There is a lack of trust, a lack of belonging, a lack of acceptance, and with this, a lack of community.

Members of the house, I cannot stress enough the importance of passing this bill. Through the measures outlined in the bill, no citizen will be left behind, whether they have been affected by public safety, need to be

educated on community safety or need rehabilitation and a friendly helping hand to make sure they are positive contributors to our communities. But the government will ask: how? Effective management, an overseeing governing body of skilled, knowledgeable people in our regions. Once the board is established, it will aid in creating safety hubs, not only protecting those that have experienced family and domestic violence but those that are looking to make change for the better in our regional and rural towns.

The sheer power and importance of this bill also lies in education. We understand that not just as a state but as a country, even as the world, we have a problem of reacting to situations rather than focusing on preventative, proactive solutions. Once public safety issues have occurred and have been identified, the trauma has already formed. The often lifelong mental ties have been created and the strain on not just the individual but on society, on the community culture, has formed. The key is in preventative education, training and support to ensure the safety of our communities is of the utmost priority.

Public safety affects more than just marginalised community groups. Acts of unsafe behaviour not only cost the community resources, time, effort and morale but they create serious disadvantage. Those of us in the regions are statistically poorer, statistically face higher rates of mortality, statistically struggle to have basic health professionals in our regions, and face levels of disadvantage compared to metropolitan Melbourne: everything from limited job opportunities to weaker telephone and internet connections, to shorter lives, higher levels of disease and injury, and poorer access and use of health services. This creates a public safety whirlpool of disadvantage. In building supportive infrastructure and attending to our weakest links, we are building stronger, resilient communities.

Acting Speaker, members of the house, I dare you to dream of a world where your future children can play outside with no fear. We can go out with friends and not play a game of Russian roulette that you will make it home safe. The opposition believes in a Victoria that is not only equal but equitable, where communities feel like home. Under this bill we are turning on the lights, we are opening the doors and we are calling for a safer Victoria.

**Jamie CAMPBELL:** I would like to echo the content warnings issued by the honourable member Correll as well as issue a content warning for police violence and mistrust.

There is so much to say about the Increasing Public Safety in Regional and Rural Areas Bill 2023. The sentiment is honourable, but some of the ways that this bill addresses community safety leave the government with a plethora of questions to ask the opposition about what this bill could possibly mean, because that is not clear from reading it. These have been placed under five umbrella themes.

Number one, this bill is designed to address the specific needs of regional Victoria in relation to public safety. Unfortunately, nowhere in the bill is a measure that specifically treats the needs of regional Victoria, and thus we ask: why are your measures specific to regional Victoria?

Number two, youth and people from minority backgrounds get access to a social worker when dealing with police. This is bold, especially considering that ‘minority’, ‘background’ and ‘minority background’ are never defined by the bill that would enshrine this change in law.

Number three, community safety hubs staffed, resourced and secured by three different parties, none of which are government affiliated in any way. The safety hubs outlined are an unclear mess that delegate the majority of the work to third parties that may not be able to provide it.

Number four, the education program, a wonderful new system that is illustrated on four dot points, three of which mean the same thing – one of which is only tangentially related to the bill and already part of the Victorian curriculum, yet another area in which this bill delegates responsibility to a body whose problem this is not and keeps us guessing who is in charge of it.

And number five, there is a lot of police reform in this bill, which we will explore more later – some of it unclear, some impossible and some downright useless. None of it is clear or well thought out enough to be considered legislation.

Essentially the government feels that key information is going unsaid throughout this lacklustre document. Notably, not once throughout this bill on public safety is the term ‘public safety’ defined, a move that leaves the

problem that it aims to address hazy and non-specific. If this bill were to be passed into law, we would never be able to measure its effectiveness given that we have no definition of the issue at stake. Is public safety about snakebites, potholes or knife crime? Uneven footpaths, police uniforms or drug abuse? Not sure – doesn't say. These issues ought not to be delegated to the same authority, but according to the bill they appear to be. At no point is adequate detail provided surrounding the implementation of any change or new program. This raises concerns, because the vague wording allows for any public safety measures to be implemented that fit within the wording of the bill, regardless of whether they are consistent with the intended purpose.

The bill is trying to be too many things and as a result is failing at becoming any of them, and this is not where the plot holes end. The government would now like to address some of the smaller issues raised within clauses or mentioned in passing that contribute to the general mess that is this bill. For a bill that places importance on public engagement and sentiments surrounding public systems, the decision to increase state-owned CCTV and public security cameras in high-traffic public areas is a controversial one for sure. Research cited by the Victorian department for community crime prevention suggested that CCTV may be useful in specific settings, namely car parks, but that security camera presence should not be increased in town centres, as it will have no measurable impact on crime rates. Does this bill target car parks or town centres? We do not know; it does not say. Unfortunately the vague wording of 'high-traffic areas' essentially allows IPSV to do whatever they like in regards to CCTV.

Finally, the government finds it pertinent to address the way this entire bill is delegating responsibility to third parties. Local councils are incumbent with operating community education programs. Private security firms are relied on to secure committee safety hubs, and 'providers of shelter, accommodation and resources such as food and bedding' are needed to be resource them.

The biggest offending area is the burden placed on social workers, who are now required for just about any police operation and for staffing community safety hubs. This bill requires an intricate network of third parties able to serve its needs while making no motion to support these third parties in any way. It is negligent of the opposition to expect endless aid from these organisations and not be legally required to support them in any way.

There is still so much to say about the Increasing Public Safety in Regional and Rural Victoria Bill 2023 – we are not remotely done here. But unfortunately my time has come to yield the floor, and thus I leave you with one message only: stand against this unclear and unconsidered piece of legislation, because the future of Victoria may just depend on it.

**Maxwell McKELLAR:** I would like to talk about the safety hubs which we discuss in our bill in clauses 5 and 6. The safety hubs to be established by the IPSV are crucial to regional and rural communities. There are people within our regional and rural communities who are not fortunate enough to have the food, shelter and accommodation that people in house here today do. These safety hubs are to be set up to help people with these needs and help people escape the dangers of regional and rural areas. I am not saying they are not in metropolitan areas, but that is not the focus of this bill today. Each safety hub will play an extremely important role moving towards a safer place for all Victorians. These safety hubs are to be open 24/7 and have police on call if necessary. It is to be run by social workers, as some people within communities are scared of police for whatever reasons. While the government does argue that social workers will be overworked, I would beg to differ. Social work is a growing industry. The government says private security is pointless with police – you cannot have police monitoring these safety hubs at all times, as they have other important matters to attend to. The IPSV will outsource this, which is not a bad thing, as the government implies. These hubs will also have a role to educate and advocate for public safety within all of our communities.

**Estella JAMES:** A key problem within this bill which we must discuss is its implementation of community safety hubs. The opposition has spoken about the importance of these hubs in increasing public safety, and I am sure that in theory they seem like a good idea. However, their implementation within this bill is woefully ignorant and has disastrous consequences for the community at large. A very apparent problem which emerges within this bill is the overworking of social workers. Under clause 5.3, community hubs will be open 24/7 and be operated by social workers. Therefore there will have to be a social worker present – at least one – at these community hubs 24/7. Social work is already an overworked and underpaid industry. A study completed by the Department of Education found that 75 per cent of social workers worked more than their contracted hours already, and over half of them said their workload was too high and they felt stressed by their job. In the face of

this information, is it really fair to be pushing this group of people into a new, more stressful job with increased hours, especially given that many of these hubs will be located in rural areas with small populations which likely have very few social workers. In clause 9 this bill states that social workers are to additionally have a much larger presence in policing – another good idea in theory, but between this and having to sink their time into sitting around at community hubs, who is going to do the social workers' very, very crucial jobs?

This is not the only issue with these community hubs. According to the bill each community hub will provide a triage service to those under the influence of drugs, with a focus on medical treatment. This bill also specifically defines a triage service as being telephone based, so those who need assistance with drug-related medical treatment will receive a phone call. It is pretty difficult to provide medical treatment over the phone. It also suggests support for those with addiction, but it does not define what the support is.

**Yuwaluxshayan KANNAN:** What is the leading factor behind change? Education and awareness – that is exactly what we aim to provide students when we are providing safety. Our primary focus will be our new generation and making this program implemented in education centres, such as high schools. Through the program students will be educated on how to stay safe in the community, how to handle high-risk scenarios and how to request help in situations, and the program will cover safety concerning drugs and alcohol, which are both prominent issues. Even learning just this will allow students to be safer and take care of themselves.

This program shall be at the discretion of the local council, along with the board, to ensure that it is delivered effectively and efficiently. This way students will be able to gain the most from the program, since it is catered towards them. By going through this program students will be able to avoid unsafe areas; call for help, including from trusted adults or emergency services during risky situations; and stay out of situations, such as by maybe refusing a drink. By combining this program with our community hubs, students will be able to learn how the hub works and how to access it, and students will also be able to be referred to the hub if needed. This is extremely useful for students in households where there is domestic violence or abuse. Only with the beginning of education can we bring change and keep our rural residents safe. With the amount of problems rural citizens face, safety should not be among them; it should be a given. Let us pass this bill, not for the sake of it but as the beginning of change for rural citizens – a beginning that will only be the future for us.

I want to ask: if education on public safety is already included in the curriculum, then why are there so many cases? Why are our residents all saying that they feel unsafe? The government has clearly missed clause 7.3, which states that it is at their own discretion. This means that a council can either keep the current education or improve it to address current issues. It is clear that there needs to be more education and awareness in our society, and that is exactly what this bill aims for. This is how we can start to keep our community safe.

**Caitlin BURNS:** The opposition's bill includes a public safety education program, which will be aimed at mainly informing high school students on staying safe in communities. The bill provides four broad topics, including drug and alcohol safety and what to do in a high-risk situation. Although the idea of an education program is commendable, it seems pointless to target high school students, given that the National Drug Strategy has been implemented in all states, until review in 2026. As a result, there are compulsory provisions in place to ensure that drug and alcohol safety is taught in every high school across the state.

In order to increase public safety we should be targeting groups without access to education programs such as this. Furthermore, the opposition has failed to provide clarity as to how this program could be implemented throughout the Victorian curriculum logistically. In no clause does it specify which year levels or ages are to receive this education. The opposition has not yet established which years of high school students will receive this education, or more broadly, which age groups are appropriate to receive this education. Whether another class is to be added to the Victorian curriculum or schools will be required to participate in an independent program is unclear.

Lastly, clause 7.3 states:

The method of implementation of the Public Safety Education program in each community shall be at the discretion of the local council and the Board.

If the method of implementation is to be at the discretion of the local council, it is guaranteed that a different form of public safety education will be taught in each of the 79 local councils across Victoria. Thus, as the proposed education program lacks detail and consistency, it will result in a disjointed attempt at educating young Victorians on public safety.

**Ryan PETERSON:** All too often concerns on public safety take the form of antisocial behaviour, crime, unsafe transport and the vulnerability of our regional and rural citizens. We as a society throw the book at and pass the blame onto these issues, saying that they are a policing problem, a population problem or a politics problem. Targeting one area of the public safety debate does nothing to address the broader issue.

Members of the house, the safety of our community is the Lernaean hydra of our modern times. We take one head off and two grow back in its place. We, the opposition, hope to take a more holistic approach, and part of that starts with the literal bricks and mortar of our regional and rural communities – yes, that is right, members of the house, infrastructure. Clause 8 of this bill outlines a comprehensive overhaul of our public spaces through lighting, CCTV systems, reporting tools, review structures and ongoing updates. It goes without saying that this is all done for a reason. Our regional and rural areas deserve to be safe and secure, whether that be in town centres, on public transport or in our community safety hubs.

We want to hear our regional populations and action their concerns. Clause 8.5 allows for this. Reports of unsafe areas will be collated, reviewed and actioned to be retrofitted as per clause 8.2(a) to the standards outlined in clauses 8.1(b) and (c), which include but are not limited to lighting and CCTV. And if the members of the government wish to question what other measures the IPSV might enact, I would remind them that this is just a baseline – the bare minimum. If it is not enough, the community will tell us and we will review. Within two years areas will be assessed for their safety and upgrades will take place.

**Matilda SECKOLD:** Today I stand before you to express my concerns and reservations regarding the proposed bill, solely focused on regional Victoria, and its impact on improving safety. While the intent behind the bill is commendable, I believe it lacks a comprehensive approach that takes into account the safety needs of the entire state of Victoria. First and foremost, the bill lacks clarity when it comes to identifying the specific regions within regional Victoria that would benefit from the proposed changes. Without clearly defining the areas to which the bill applies it becomes difficult to evaluate its potential impact or allocate resources appropriately. To ensure fairness and equal protection it is imperative that we establish transparent criteria and guidelines for the implementation. Furthermore, this bill claims to be about regional safety and yet nothing in it addresses the specific needs of regional areas. As my fellow members will elaborate on, several clauses, such as ‘Increased Policing’, will be detrimental to these areas due to their small population and large areas.

While I appreciate the intent behind the bill, I believe it falls short in addressing the safety needs of the entire state of Victoria. It is crucial that we adopt a comprehensive approach that encompasses all regions while considering the variations in crime rates across different areas. By doing so we can develop legislation that truly ensures the safety and wellbeing of all Victorians. Let us strive for a holistic approach to safety legislation that encompasses the entire state.

**Sabina KOCH:** This bill at its core is about increasing public safety in rural and regional areas. With specific reference to clause 9, the purpose is to have a joint response that combines the expertise of professionals to de-escalate situations, provide appropriate resources and prevent unnecessary use of force. Social workers can help facilitate diversion programs that redirect individuals away from crime and be the bridge between the individual and police. Social workers and policing may also participate in policy development and advocacy efforts, drawing from their expertise in social welfare and justice issues. Furthermore, social workers can provide support and guidance to young Victorians who may be involved in or affected by policing incidents. They can work with young individuals to understand the underlying factors contributing to their behaviour, addressing any social or emotional challenges they may be facing and helping to develop positive coping strategies and life skills. In addition, social workers can play a pivotal role in advocating for redirection and alternatives to assist Victorians who are involved in low-level offences. Instead of entering the juvenile system, social workers can work with the youth, the families and the justice system to develop individualised plans to address the root of their behaviour and connect those affected with appropriate community resources and support services.

**Helix HAMILTON:** The opposition says they understand the unique challenges that communities in rural and regional Victoria face and that the projects and reforms outlined in their bill will be beneficial to these communities because of their consideration of these challenges. However, does the opposition understand that their police reforms outlined in clause 10 are simply not possible for many rural and regional police services to complete? According to recent data, 102 of Victoria’s 332 police stations are manned by a single officer. That is almost one-third of all the police stations in the state, and almost all of these stations were unsurprisingly in

rural and regional areas. These 102 officers hold all manner of jobs, as they are the only one in their area who is available for highway patrol, crime scene investigation, search and rescue, welfare checks, firearms inspection, traffic management, community outreach and education, and even just answering the phone in the police station. As such, these officers never get a true break, and yet somehow the opposition wants to increase the officers' workload by making them patrol around the community more at night while simultaneously being available at the drop of a hat if these new community safety hubs require them while simultaneously doing all their other jobs as the only police officer in town. As I should barely have to point out, this is just not doable for these officers and their communities. The opposition may claim that the government needs to read the bill, but I have read this bill – and nowhere in this bill is there a clause that outlines how regional and rural communities are going to be provided more police officers to meet the increased demand that the opposition wants to put in place. I put it to you that this bill's updates in police practices are not currently feasible, with no prepared solution on how they may ever become achievable for a third of Victoria.

**Natasha CORLUKA:** In our society police are meant to be the protectors, the ones we go to for help, but due to their power over us, many view them as a threat. To reform such a vital and widespread aspect of the Victorian community is a very difficult thing to do, though I believe this bill addresses this perfectly. While individual rights and institutional powers may not be perceived as adequate, clause 10.3 focuses on bringing police down from their pedestals, creating more of a sense of warmth and protection individuals may feel. Making police officers more approachable is definitely needed in our society, as more-approachable police leads to many individuals feeling more comfortable with police. This chain of events continues on a positive rally, where more people approaching people leads to more cases being identified, leading to not only a safer community but also better mental health, as individuals will feel an increased sense of capability and empowerment to go to these officers for protection rather than internalising their struggles. Subsequently the number of individuals afraid to walk at night and/or in unsafe areas is arbitrary. I would like to draw the house's attention to clause 10.1, which states that:

There shall be an increase in policing services at night and in areas deemed unsafe ...

Tackling both these aspects of the Victorian community will even further benefit the way our state is policed and protected. Why refute the chance to increase public safety – our safety? Shame on the government.

**Alice TILSON:** I would like to draw the house's attention to clause 9.2, which reads:

All youth and individuals from minority backgrounds shall have rights to request a social worker while engaging with police services;

Yet nowhere in the bill is 'minority backgrounds' defined, leaving it up to the police's personal discretion to decide who is minority enough to grant them access to a social worker. This is dangerous and, as evidenced by the lack of definitions, clearly not well thought through. It appears that the opposition does not care enough about the people from minority background that they are supposed to be protecting to even define them. Furthermore, what role a social worker would actually be completing is not once expanded upon, only that they will be present in an abundance of situations and not assume the role of a parent or guardian. So what exactly is it that they are doing which is so necessary to dictate their presence in every police station, sitting around during a shortage in the profession? The opposition clearly does not know.

The final nail in the coffin is clause 9.3, which states:

... the direction of the social worker is primary, unless deemed by the officers to be unsafe for all involved parties.

But there is no criteria for 'unsafe', leaving a vital step once again up to individual police discretion. For them to decide when they should be in charge of a situation – what could possibly go wrong?

To summarise, a mass of social workers, which do not exist in these numbers, will be there to complete an unspecified role for a category of minority backgrounds which, depending on the police officer the person interacts with, could include all women, LGBTQ+ people, people of colour, people of a low socio-economic background, religious people – or maybe atheists – or none of the above. It has been left up to the officer to decide. The social workers will perform this mysterious task until – *(Time expired)*

**Jasmine TWIGG:** I would like to add a content warning on this. There may be some topics I mention that might be a bit uncomfortable to some people, so if you would like to leave, now would be your chance.



The government is now just nitpicking on the bill, which they already can tell is very well written. I can tell that all areas are prone to danger. I come from a town which the 2016 census says has about 500–600 people, and a bit over 10 years ago a woman who was nearly due to have a baby went missing. They still have not found any more evidence, apart from what car she was last seen in.

But none of the speakers on the government side have mentioned that they can do medical appointments over the phone. Have you been in the post-COVID world? We are doing doctor's appointments over the phone because of this COVID pandemic that happened within the last two years. You cannot say we cannot do medical appointments over the phone when already we have been doing this for nearly three years now.

**Asha SURUJPAL:** I would like to express some concerns identified in clause 10, entitled 'Increased Policing Services'. While I acknowledge their attempt at making these regional and rural areas safer, I must in good faith inform the opposition of the negative implications seen as a result of increased police services. However, before I begin I would like to provide a content warning as this will discuss marginalised communities' experience with police and their issues of overpolicing.

Overpolicing creates disproportionate influxes in crime rates, especially in marginalised communities. What the opposition is advocating for can easily lead to overpolicing. Put simply, this will misrepresent the nature or severity of crime and harm within an area, as it reinforces and highlights negative stereotypes within them while simultaneously removing resources from other deserving areas. Those in marginalised communities are more likely to get picked up on for small misdemeanours in comparison to those who are not. Subsequently, this creates disproportionate over-representation of marginalised communities within the crime statistics and data as it can lead to profiling based on physical, socio-economic and other features. What the opposition is suggesting perpetuates these systemic disadvantages, and for that I call shame on the opposition.

**Members:** Shame!

**Asha SURUJPAL:** I ask the opposition to read the facts and do better, because it is clear that this bill was created from a place of privilege and not with all Victorian communities in mind.

**Molly MEADOWS:** As previously mentioned by the honourable member Peterson, this bill is just the baseline for improvement of rural and regional safety. This is not where we draw the line on safety. Living in a small rural town myself, at times I have felt unsafe walking home. I can confirm that with the minimum addition of lighting, I would feel safer getting home. I never thought in my town of 800 people I would feel unsafe, yet here we are. Let us increase the safety of all rural and regional areas. Again, this is just the baseline.

**Zaralee McAULIFFE-DOUTHAT:** These safety hubs are not crucial for safety; they are a safety risk for the communities they aim to police – communities like mine, as I happen to live in one of these high risk, high crime areas. Police presence is already too high. They park themselves in our streets with their lights off, just waiting for something bad to happen when no-one has called.

Furthermore, on the triage services, drug dependence and issues like that require multidisciplinary teams to assist those people in recovery. These triage services do not offer that. They cannot even offer, without a medical officer, life-saving drugs like Narcan. That is not to mention that online triage services already do exist and are already in use, which was a good point made by the opposition, so why do we need another one? In regional Victoria we already have Nurse-on-Call, and we have the VVED, which is the Victorian virtual emergency department, which puts people in contact with their local emergency department and their staff so that if they are in need of an ambulance, it will be called and they can be transported. You do not need these hubs in communities when all they are going to do is increase police presence and not actually offer a useful amount of help to people who need it.

**Syazwani SAIFUDIN:** The government previously said that safety needs that encompass all regions are needed. This is like comparing bananas and fish sausages. The government clearly does not understand the nuances of this complex issue. You cannot generalise metropolitan areas and vast rural and regional areas. It is simply unjust and will accomplish nothing. This is why the bill's so-called vagueness occurs. It is not vague; it simply leaves a lot of measures up to a community's discretion because such issues vary from community to community. That is why, if you read the bill, clause 5.2 says:

The placement of Community Safety Hubs shall be determined by IPSV based on the needs of each rural and regional area.

The ‘needs’ – that is the focus of this bill: addressing the needs of communities and leaving things up to their discretion.

Additionally, I would like to draw the house’s attention to clause 10.2. This gives IPSV the power to alter police training and wants to remove biases.

**Quinn Le FEVRE:** What is considered to be one of the best ways to decrease police and public conflict according to the opposition? It is not amending the Victoria Police Act 2013, section 59B(4), so everyone finally understands what ‘responsible and necessary force’ means. It is not preventing Victoria Police from conducting oversight investigations whenever police brutality occurs. No, those things are not important. But according to the opposition, changing the uniform somehow is. Apparently, under clause 10.3(c) of this bill, changing the police uniform will make police officers more approachable and will increase public safety. To this, I ask: how.

Firstly, this bill does not explain how the uniforms are going to change, just that they are going to. It does not explain whose uniforms are going to change and over what time period. It does not even explain what is wrong with the current uniforms and why they are changing. According to this bill, the IPSV is going to change the uniform in unknown ways for unknown reasons. Sounds convincing.

Secondly, whichever way the uniform is changed it is not likely to have the effects the opposition wants it to. If the uniform gets changed to more casual and less intimidating, police officers’ approachability might be improved, but according to experiments they are more likely to get assaulted. Alternatively, if the police uniform is changed to be more parliamentary style and threatening, more law-abiding may occur, but at the cost of people being scared to approach and confide in officers if they have experienced harm, which may decrease public safety. There is a way to win by changing uniform, so do not.

**Maddison ROBERTS-CASTANO:** In our society one of our main priorities should be the protection of all people, regardless of where they live. To follow on from a point made earlier by honourable member Corluka, this bill will likely see a decrease in crime rates and will likely deter further crime, which will in turn benefit mental wellbeing and create a safer environment, which in turn will keep people with an ease of mind, which will then in turn strengthen community engagement and overall wellbeing. Above all else there is support: support for youth, support for police and support for regional and rural communities.

**Raidah PARVEZ:** I would like to preface this speech with a content warning for mentions of oppression and Indigenous incarceration. In relation to clause 10, as mentioned by honourable member Surujpal, over-policing reinforces negative stereotypes and upholds a system of oppression. With 65 per cent of the Indigenous Australian population in rural and remote areas, increasing policing services in such areas would do exactly that. How can the opposition claim to care about their protection when their bill does the opposite? In Victoria the Indigenous incarceration rate is 2418 per 100,000 adults. Does the opposition intend to increase this number? To reiterate honourable member Surujpal’s point, white privilege is written all over this bill. I urge the opposition to take off their rose-tinted glasses and recognise the impact of colonisation on our Indigenous communities before writing a bill.

**Verity ORME:** Clause 1(b) of this bill refers to using a preventative approach to crime rather than a reactive one. This strategy has already been proven time and time again to be effective in other countries all over the world. It makes sense to implement an already tried and proven strategy.

**Flora GILLIES:** We need to look towards an equal Victoria. Why not include metropolitan Melbourne? It does have more population, so it should have more police safety. A concentric model shows how the rates of danger increase as you move closer towards the city, meaning it is fair enough that metro Melbourne has more policing. If the opposition wants to focus on preventing Victorians from being in public and domestic environments that could cause them physical or psychological harm, why not include all of Melbourne? The problems the opposition has addressed – spiked drinks, scared children unsafe on transport – are unfortunately true across all of Victoria. Do not cut off the nose to spite the face.

Furthermore, social workers are already in heavy demand. How does the opposition suggest they will get enough to operate community hubs, let alone 24/7? Additionally honourable member Correll mentioned that many rural citizens do not have wi-fi or internet access. How then does the opposition expect them in rural areas to access this triage service? The opposition should focus on one problem first before addressing another.

We are not nitpicking the bill. The things we have outlined are clear and detrimental to the bill's functioning. It would be negligent of us to just ignore them. Moreover, we are talking about medical appointments over the phone. Medical treatment is the issue being discussed for people actively suffering from drug and alcohol issues. Clause 6 suggests support for those with addiction. This support will help people struggling with drugs to re-engage with the community and support them to better their wellbeing. This is all well and good, but at the end of the day those words are just words. There is no sort of plan, strategy or explanation as to what the support entails or how it will be carried out. How will those suffering with addiction be re-engaged with the community? How will they be supported? This bill offers us no sort of explanation.

**Sophie CHEN:** Everybody, let us turn to clause 8.3. It clearly states that the board shall assess and rank all rural and regional areas for high crime risk within 10 years of commencement of this bill – within 10 years. It is a deadline; it is not a time line.

To once again reiterate honourable member Peterson and honourable member Meadows, this bill is achieving the bare minimum – a bare minimum that will be constantly evolving and improving. This is only the beginning of what this bill can achieve, if enacted, for all members of the community. Stop making excuses.

**Angelo von MÖLLER:** As some of the honourable members opposite earlier this week said, which is contrary to what the honourable member McKellar stated, social workers are being overworked. As well as the understaffing of the regional police force, why does the opposition want to keep social workers and the police force overworked? This is a commendable bill, but it is like a cake missing the batter – it is all chocolate and no cake. It is strongly lacking in key areas, and I implore the opposition to seriously consider the additional consequences of this bill.

**Dimithri WICKRAMARATNE:** Firstly, I just want to thank this side of the chamber for all their hard work in preparing this bill and for speaking from the heart. I know it is a passionate subject, which is why it is such a shame that the government would even dare trash it and play semantics and nitpick and go on about perfection. This is a good bill, which would do a lot for rural areas. Yes, it does not focus on the metropolitan areas, and yes, there are problems in the metropolitan areas, and we are well aware of that, but this bill is not about that; it is about focusing on rural areas and regions and giving them a fair share, making them more equitable and addressing concerns which have been unaddressed for far too long.

**Kaidance GREEN:** We are not criticising the bill for focusing on regional Victoria; we are criticising it for not addressing the specific needs of regional Victoria. Why is it that metropolitan members in this house today are talking on behalf of regional and rural Victoria? As somebody who has lived in rural Victoria and is currently living in regional Victoria, I can assure that this bill will not help the community. Instead, this bill will be overworking social workers and not improving anything.

**Zariah WEBB:** The opposition acknowledges and takes in the criticism made against clause 9.3, but I would like to remind the government that good is better than zero, especially when it comes to safety. If the government wants to increase public safety in metropolitan Melbourne, it should make its own bill.

**Hugo Nawat SOMBOONSIN:** Victoria, I believe, is a state of relative security compared to the rest of the world. At the moment the opposition is fearmongering. They have given only the flimsiest evidence for their bill. What even is public safety? The bill is vague and undefined. They are doing a bunch of things for something that I bet they cannot even define. Then they say that it is because it leaves it up to the community to decide. Why? What does that even mean? The opposition says that this is the bare minimum. Frankly, I find this disappointing. Why not aim higher? Why not do better?

Let us talk about the police increase. They want to increase policing at night and in high-risk areas, according to some unspecified criteria. I question how increasing policing will help these communities, when evidence shows – lots and lots of evidence shows – that increasing policing does nothing to help and only increases pressure on marginalised communities across the state and across the world. Then they claim that this bill is for a more equal Victoria. I question how, once again, when they specifically prescribe that this bill is only for regional and rural areas, with apparently justification of some sort that they deserve it. I do not understand. And I do not believe that we should be doing it just simply because; we should have a proper prioritisation framework that encompasses the whole state if we are to be truly equal.

Now let us go to these community safety hubs. They provide a place for the homeless and vulnerable. Once again, the police are more likely to profile the homeless and vulnerable as those causing trouble, so to speak. So in conclusion I say this: this bill is not going to work.

**The ACTING SPEAKER:** I wish to call on the sponsor of the bill for the right of reply.

**Lilly CORRELL:** I would like to start off by saying to the government: read the bill. The bill is titled Increasing Public Safety in Regional and Rural Areas Bill 2023. This whole idea and claim that we need to focus on metropolitan areas is redundant, as the bill specifically addresses our regional and rural areas. If they managed to make it past the title page, they would need only to look at clause 6: that community safety hub services will not only support those that are facing homelessness but domestic violence with shelter, accommodation and provide resources and food and bedding.

I will direct them now to the public safety education program. As mentioned by the opposition, they stated that there was already a statewide education program that focused on alcohol and drugs, but where is the mention of 7.1 (a), (b) and (c): what to do to get help, how to get help and how to stay safe? That is not implemented in our schools, and this is what our bill is proposing.

I will also highlight that education is at the discretion of the local councils and the local education. Why? Because it is important that we are looking after our communities. We are not looking after your communities, because we do not know what your communities need. Everybody has the right to protect their own community. Everybody has the right for their community to flourish and thrive, and what is right for some communities may not be right for others.

I will direct the opposition now to clause 9. They complain that social workers will be underpaid and overworked. I will highlight that it states that all youth and individuals from minority backgrounds shall have the right to request – the right to request. We are giving these people that are often misrepresented and unappreciated the opportunity to have someone to stand up for them. We are not putting words into their mouths; we are giving them a chance.

I call upon the government to take a long hard look at themselves. This is a bill that will make Victoria safe.

**The ACTING SPEAKER:** The question is:

That the Increasing Public Safety in Regional and Rural Areas Bill 2023 now be read a second and a third time.

**House divided on question:**

<b>Ayes</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>Noes</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>Majority in favour</b>	<b>1</b>

**Question agreed to.**

**Read second time.**

**Read third time.**

*Members applauded.*

**The ACTING SPEAKER:** Well done. Congratulations. I feel the tension from here. Well done on a very respectful first debate for our very big Thursday. You should all be very proud of yourselves. I just want to give a quick shout-out to the few speakers I have written down: the honourable member Campbell, the honourable member Correll, the honourable member Hamilton, the honourable member Saifudin and our Leader of the Opposition, member Wickramaratne. You all spoke beautifully, you all spoke very clearly, articulately, and you should all be very proud of yourselves. I commend you for your efforts and everyone else as well in the house today. Well done.

*Members applauded.*

**Dimithri WICKRAMARATNE:** Acting Speaker, on behalf of the whole chamber, I would like to thank you for your service, and I would like to thank the public gallery for attending this morning's session. I hope you can stick around for the remaining debates. Thank you.

*Members applauded.*

**Sitting suspended 10:26 am until 10:47 am.**

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Matt Fregon):** Good morning. My name is Matt Fregon. I am the member for Ashwood. I sit just there on the right in the second row. I am also the Deputy Speaker of this house, the Legislative Assembly. I snuck a quick listen to you guys before, and you are all doing a very good job and, can I say, are better behaved than some others. Keep that up.

My background before getting into politics was in IT. I graduated from Deakin with a business degree in computers, went on to work in corporate IT as a programmer and systems analyst and then started my own business about 20 years ago. I ran that until I had kids and started to think about the world that my wife Rebecca and I were going to leave to them. That drew me into joining the Labor Party, of which I am a very proud member. I ended up putting my hand up for the seat of Mount Waverley in 2018, and although I was not expecting to be here, here I am. In 2021 the VEC decided in their wisdom to delete the seat of Mount Waverley, which I thought was a bit cheeky, and I was lucky to be preselected for the new seat of Ashwood, which is where I live. The people of my community voted me in to continue to represent them, which has got to be the greatest privilege of my working life. That is the essence of the seats that you are sitting in today: every one of those seats has a member who is elected by their own community – the majority preferenced them to speak for them in this house. That is what we are meant to do, and hopefully we do. If you take away the political divide in this place, in which there is the theatre and the argy-bargy and all of that, I would say that without a doubt all members on either side of the chamber – all the independents, all the Greens or anyone else – take their jobs very seriously and do their very best to make our state a better place. That is a bit about me, but today is more about you. With that note, I call on the sponsor of the bill.

### **Travel Emission Reduction Strategies Bill 2023**

**Sponsor:** Boroondara Youth

**Refuter:** Y Geelong

*Introduction and first reading*

**Madeleine DRISCOLL:** I move:

That I introduce a bill titled Travel Emission Reduction Strategies Bill 2023.

**Motion agreed to.**

**Read first time.**

*Second reading*

**Madeleine DRISCOLL:** I move:

That the bill be now read a second time.

We are in the midst of a global climate crisis. This is our final opportunity to enforce significant change to eventuate meaningful outcomes. I feel as though it is easy to sometimes distance ourselves from this issue, so I shall start by personalising this issue to us as young people, young Victorians. If global emissions continue to increase, Victoria will experience double the number of extremely hot days, annual average temperature increases of up to 2.4 degrees, longer fire seasons, up to double the number of high-fire-risk days and sea levels rising by about 24 centimetres in our state. Is this the Victoria we want? Is this the Victoria that we want to contribute to? We can help take action, because at its core that is what this bill is about. It is about reducing emissions.

Transport is the second-largest sector of emissions in Victoria, accounting for a whopping 25 per cent. Transport is also the fastest-growing source of said emissions, with an increase in the sector of 2.5 megatons of

CO<sub>2</sub> emissions – 12 per cent – between 2005 and 2019. Victoria’s strong economic and population growth in recent years has led to significant increases in transport demand and usage. This bill is about encouraging change, allowing people to better access public transport, cycling and walking to increase the appeal of these options and establish resources to increase the safety and ease of alternative, sustainable travel modes.

The opposition understands that those who desire alternative transport are deterred by access, quality and the efficiency of these means. There are three primary problems existing within the current system: the first is congestion and crowding. With Victorians experiencing significant congestion on roads, trains and trams, this means trips take longer, are less comfortable and are less reliable, which costs people and businesses time and money. This bill can help fix this.

The second problem is that the accepted solution of building new infrastructure to ease congestion will not solve the problem unless we take other steps. We must first make the most of existing infrastructure and programs. We must build upon it and put systems in place to fully reap the benefits of our current public transportation system. We have existing facilities that have the potential to be incredible, to revolutionise travel. This bill can help fix this.

The third problem is that there are no incentives in the current system for people to change their behaviour. Our current system is simple, but public transport is unpredictable. Walking may feel unsafe; cyclists are deterred by congested roads and lack of changing facilities. This does not encourage people to make different choices about the time, mode, route or quality of their trip. This means that even as congestion worsens, people are not motivated to change their behaviour. This bill can help fix this.

This bill addresses concerns regarding public transport and efficiency. It addresses the ways in which the appeal of cycling as transportation can be increased. This bill addresses safety and accessibility concerns regarding walking as a transport mode. This bill will help us. This bill will make lives better and lives easier and simultaneously support Victoria’s climate goals – Victoria’s future. Would the government not want a more punctual public transport system? Would the government not want bike riders to feel supported and safe? Would the government not want walking to be safer at night, safer in general? The government has the opportunity to help our constituents in a multifaceted manner, to improve their ‘now’ and secure their future.

Finally I would like to circle back to the primary purpose of this bill, something I believe must be kept at the forefront of this debate. This is a bill about reducing emissions. While it will undeniably improve the quality of living, this bill is written to act in line with the net zero emissions climate goals. For better or for worse, this is not a bill to fix public transport. It is not a bill about public safety. It is a bill meant to help increase the appeal of low-emission transport. It is at its core a climate bill.

**Angelo von MÖLLER:** I would like to preface that this debate will make reference to people living with disability as well as acts of arson. If that is triggering to you, I will allow people to leave the chamber as well as the gallery.

Firstly, I would like to acknowledge that this bill means well. It does, and I stated that when I met with the members for Boroondara last month. However, sometimes things with good intentions have unintended outcomes, and that is exactly what this bill does. It is a flawed bill. In fact it is so flawed that if this bill was a building, it would cast a shadow over the Burj Khalifa. That is how flawed this bill is – from its overpowered travel emission reduction board to its absolute nonsense efficiency system that will cut off sections of routes as well as a notification system that is already implemented. I could go on, but like Lionel Richie, we would be here *All Night Long*, so I will spare the chamber that.

I am sure I speak on behalf of the rest of the government by saying that this bill is admirable, but I am also sure that they would agree that this bill’s dodgy wording will lead to home owners who are building a swimming pool for their backyard having to build a bike rack with it as well. This bill is government bureaucracy at its finest, with complete oversight on all developments and the conducting of research. That is what this board will do. It is another opportunity to give mates a nice-paying job that requires frolicking up and down highways with a magnifying glass like an arsonist on a windy 40-degree day, while burning down the budgets of everyday, hardworking Victorians, working hard mostly to build a bike shed in their backyard while building a patio.

Those opposite are saying that cars are the problem. I hate to break it to those opposite, but if this bill was passed, this bill would be the problem. This bill is like a game of crosswords, except that none of the answers make any sense. If those opposite left their offices for a moment and touched grass, they would see that removing lanes for cars and replacing them with buses to slow cars down is not the solution. People will die from the consequences of this bill. Buses will not take you to the hospital, ambulances will. Ambulances will be stuck in congestion on roads, and police will not turn up in a bus to save you. This is a crooked bill, but those opposite would have you believe otherwise.

The opposition want to live in a fairytale land where it is not worth driving a car anymore. This bill will ruin the weekends – no more family car drives, no more holiday car trips interstate. Those opposite are only after your money, because they know they will get the commission from the airlines and public transport. They want to rip it from you like a bandaid on a new wound. Those opposite think it is like taking candy from a baby, but I have faith that the members of this place are not as complacent as that. I highly implore the house to vote no on this bill. Vote no for your family, vote no to save the lives of everyday Victorians and vote no to show those opposite that you do not want their hands in your pockets.

**Sophie CHEN:** Transport is the fastest growing source of the state's emissions, increasing 12 per cent each year. The planet is everyone's responsibility. It is time to act, and the opposition has and will with this bill. I would like to bring attention to clause 4 – 'Establishment of the Travel Emission Reduction Board', a progressive entity that will pave the way towards a greener, more sustainable future for our beautiful state of Victoria. One of the fortifying strengths of this board lies in its composition, which is carefully designed to be representative of the diverse population of Victoria. By including individuals from various age groups, cultural backgrounds, socio-economic statuses and geographical locations, we will ensure that the decisions made by the board are both inclusive and considerate of the needs and perspectives of all Victorians. Nobody is overlooked. Not only is this bill inextricably linked to the goodwill of the community, as you can see in clause 4.3(b) this board will actively engage with daily commuters, conducting surveys to understand their travel patterns, common routes and modes of transport. This information is vital in helping us identify opportunities to promote greener alternatives and thus implement targeted strategies to reduce congestion and emissions.

The role of the board is both comprehensive and far-reaching. It begins with conducting vital research into travel-related emissions reduction. By delving deep into this field, the board will gain invaluable insights and knowledge that will drive the development of evidence-based policies and strategies. This research is crucial to establishing a sustainable transportation system. This is a step that we need to take to get those alarming emission stats down. No need to worry – the board also ensures that these efforts are coordinated and impactful, leading to tangible outcomes. The board's commitment to conducting an annual review of programs, as stated in clause 4.5, demonstrates a dedication to accountability and continuous improvement. This transparent approach enables the board to refine and strengthen our initiatives, ensuring we remain on track. There should be absolutely no hesitation on what this board can achieve and what this bill will achieve for Australia. It is time to hop on this bill of change, turn the wheel and jump on this bill. It is time to start the pivotal fight against climate change.

**Dimithri WICKRAMARATNE:** On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, I request permission for members of this chamber to remove their jackets.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** It is not that hot. I think we have standing orders with uniform codes, and you might want to take that up with the Standing Orders Committee. I think we can all leave our jackets on, surely.

**Dimithri WICKRAMARATNE:** Fair enough.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Thank you.

**Jamie CAMPBELL:** First off I would just like to address how the opposition claims that transport is the top-emitting sector. Transport is an incredibly wide industry. Is transport being the top-emitting sector referring to citizens driving cars or to big lorries doing trips across the country or celebrities zooming around in their private jets all day? Transport is such a wide industry, and this bill has such a narrow focus. The Travel Emission Reduction Strategies Bill 2023 does address travel emissions in a number of roundabout ways, some

effective, some less so. Namely the government has questions about the effectiveness and possibility of some of the proposed changes to the public transport system.

Thus, in no particular order, gripe number one, clauses 5.2 to 5.4 state the frequency of trains, buses and trams shall be increased at peak times on essential routes. What the opposition deem 'essential' is never defined, nor is how a board may go about determining that. It seems unnecessarily limited, and I am concerned that this would not end up impacting that many people.

Gripe number two, clause 6.1 talks about addressing the punctuality of public transport and then only really goes on to talk about buses. The 'priority' sense is not defined, so I am going to have to assume they are to give public transport priority at intersections – correct me if I am wrong. Also define it next time. They are already kind of thing I think for trams, and they risk making congestion worse. Increasing the efficiency of trains is also an undertaking that is going to require a lot of new infrastructure, so I would be curious to see how the opposition plans on fitting it in with Victoria's various Big Build projects. I do not know, I wish that the opposition had addressed this area with more thought and care, because it is a really significant shortcoming of this bill.

Gripe number three, clause 6.4. I think it is fair to say that congested areas are more commonly found in metro areas and regional centres, where bus stops are placed often as little as 200 metres apart. On many routes, even in congested areas, there would be literally no way for bus services to pursue alternative routes and reach all stops. It is a good idea in theory but is impractical and a bit pointless in reality.

**Lennon JABLONKA:** I would now like to bring the house's attention to clause 5, or increasing the capacity of public transport. This clause details how we the opposition plan on lessening the strain on transport. See, we can advocate and educate for walking and bicycle riding, but in reality there is always going to be people who cannot or will not bike or walk. This is a good thing. By increasing the capacity of public transport and incentivising other forms of transport, not only will trams, trains and buses be more accessible for all, they would still be more sustainable than other traditional forms of transport, such as driving. According to Our World in Data, by taking a train over a medium distance our carbon emissions will be reduced by 80 per cent as opposed to driving a car. This is huge and would considerably lessen the carbon footprint of Victoria as a whole.

Now you know the why, but what the how? Well, some in the government may question what 'peak time' and 'essential routes' mean. To answer that question, the house may simply turn to clause 4.3(b), specifically points (i) and (v). These points outline how the TER board will determine these elements of the bill, specifically by surveying communities, thus allowing the public and the people who need transport most to inform the TER on what is important to them. By increasing the capacity and therefore availability of public transport, we the opposition are –

**Jack DUMBLE:** I would like to begin with the fact that I wholeheartedly agree with the sentiment of the bill. Emissions and the need for public transport is something that I am specifically extremely passionate about. I believe the fact I am standing here so adamantly against this bill shows that the flaws are far too prevalent in this bill to be ignored. If I had a whiteboard and 2 hours of time, I could begin to explain the problems clearly apparent in this bill, but because I only have 2 minutes I will only touch on small but important points. A significant issue in this bill is the childish trivialisation of the sheer complexity of the public transport system and the fine-tuned and extremely complex science needed to implement public transport at the scale that the opposition asks for.

To all in the chamber who have not read the bill recently, please tell me: who do you believe is on the board of this bill, educated individuals and specialists in the field? According to the opposition, this is a foolish thought, because to the opposition obviously it should be the general layman of Victoria. I am sorry, I am not sure anyone in this room, including, clearly, the opposition and I, are qualified to be on this board. Deputy Speaker, I am sure you have experienced your fair share of dodgy drivers on the road. Are these the people you want on the board in charge of public transport? I mean, there is no mention for the board to even need to know the road laws at all. I am so glad this is a Youth Parliament bill or else I am afraid I might get rear-ended by bus.



I do have to give credit to the opposition. The guidelines of the bill are comprehensive – so comprehensive, in fact, that I do not think the board is even required at all. The amount of hand-holding in this is so severe that I doubt the opposition even trusts the board to cross the street that they are supposed to be managing.

**Sabina KOCH:** As a young, proud Victorian myself who relies primarily on the means of public transport to travel around metropolitan Melbourne, it is clear that our public transport system is flawed. Public transport schedules may not always meet the needs of commuters, with long waiting times between services or inconsistent arrival times. This is clearly outlined in clause 6, where it states that the TER board will address the punctuality of public transport by implementing more bus lanes and traffic responses to direct buses away from congestion. Public Transport Users Association states that Melbourne's train network was infrequent compared with those in similar global cities. I ask the government: is jeopardising young Victorians' education due to the inefficiency of the transport acceptable? Daniel Bowen, a spokesperson from the Public Transport Users Association, voiced during an interview with the *Age* that:

People don't like to live their life around a train timetable: if they see the train only runs every 30 or 40 minutes, they're likely to just jump in the car and drive ...

I would like to reiterate the fact that this bill at its core is about the reduction of travel emissions. The globe is in a crisis and is only 10 years away from catastrophic climate change and a greenhouse gas emissions tipping point, at which point such change will become irreversible. I would like the government to use their common sense.

**Ruby-Rose BRADDOCK:** I commend the opposition for coming up with a bill that is so topical in Australia's current ecological climate. However, I would like to draw attention to increasing the appeal of cycling as transportation. While the proposal outlined presents several good measures to increase the appeal of cycling, it is important to consider the potential drawbacks and challenges that may arise from its way of implementation. The inclusion of more bike lanes on newly constructed main roads – clause 7.1 – may pose significant challenges. Retrofitting roads with bike lanes may require significant modifications to infrastructure. Additionally, adding bike lanes to newly constructed main roads might not be practical or feasible in every location, especially in densely populated urban areas that are limited for additional lanes. Clause 7.3 states:

The TER board shall ensure sufficient bike parking is included in all new developments. Parking shall include;

- (a) Racks;
- (b) Sheds.

What do those new developments mean? Does this mean that if someone wants to build a swimming pool in their backyard they will have to build a bike rack and shed? Or if a new light feature is put into the area, does that mean that that light feature will need an individual bike rack and shed? This is undefined and ridiculous if taken exactly how it is written.

Clause 7.4 states:

The TER board shall ensure provision of hygiene facilities for cyclists upon arrival ...

My question is: who will ensure that the maintenance and cleanliness of these facilities are upheld and that adequate resources are allocated to sustain them over time? Is it the board or is it the local council? It is not expanded upon. This bill has great value, but it needs more defining and an allocation of responsibility.

**Syazwani SAIFUDIN:** Cycling is not just a recreational activity; it is a sustainable and efficient mode of transport that has numerous benefits for individuals, communities and the environment. It is imperative we make cycling safer and more accessible. First, this bill will increase the provision of dedicated bike lanes to ensure the safety of cyclists, separating them from motorised traffic and reducing accident risk. In the last five years 55 bicycle riders have been killed on Victorian roads. This is 55 far too many. Barriers separating bike lanes from motor vehicle lanes on busy, high-accident roads will prevent this inevitable tragedy. Another vital aspect is the availability of safe and secure bike storage in communal and commercial areas. Many potential cyclists hesitate to embrace cycling due to concerns about theft and vandalism. By providing secure bike storage facilities we alleviate these worries. Furthermore, the closing of public toilets, showers and changing areas should not hinder individuals from choosing cycling as a mode of transport. By providing dedicated hygiene facilities, as outlined in clause 7.4, we can make cycling a more viable option for people of all backgrounds. This inclusive approach ensures that no-one is deterred from embracing the benefits of cycling due to a lack of amenities.

Additionally, in a world in which access and opportunity remain unevenly distributed, a government bicycle subsidy program targeting lower socio-economic areas is not just important, it is essential. Such a program breaks down transportation barriers, enabling individuals to commute to work, access education and pursue economic opportunities. It promotes physical wellbeing, reduces pollution and fosters a sense of community. By investing in equitable transportation, especially bikes, we uplift marginalised communities, empower individuals and pave the way for a more sustainable and inclusive society. If the government continues to turn a blind eye to the undeniable benefits of this bill, then they will be left in the crusty dust, clinging desperately to outdated ideas while the world pedals towards a greener, healthier and more equal future.

**Alice TILSON:** Reducing emissions by making climate-friendly transport more accessible is a noble cause. However, this bill fails to realise why so many people have to drive cars and why simply increasing frequency is not enough. In much of regional and rural Victoria there is no public transport infrastructure. Trains do not extend there, and trams certainly are not around. Furthermore, bus services are privatised, meaning that a lot of these measures will not help a lot of regional Victoria as they refer to Public Transport Victoria, not private systems. Increasing public transport is no help to people where there is no public transport infrastructure to increase in the first place. Most people living in rural Victoria have to drive cars by necessity due to distance. This bill furthers the divide between rural and metropolitan Victoria by granting copious, wonderful measures which realistically would in large only affect metropolitan Melbourne, as walking and cycling are not viable given the distances between destinations in rural Victoria and, as I have already touched on, increasing public transport is no help where the infrastructure does not exist in the first place.

The only way we can help fix the climate crisis is by looking beyond metro Melbourne and addressing the unique issues in regional Victoria. A few more people finding climate-friendly transport more welcoming is all well and good, but it will not make a sizeable difference in the climate crisis if we do not address the thousands of people who have no sustainable transport remotely near them and physically cannot walk or cycle the distance. This bill is lacking in an understanding of the state of transportation across the state. Climate change will only be solved if we all work together – metropolitan and regional Victoria – by addressing the specific needs of different communities, which this bill fails to do.

**Zariah WEBB:** Everybody hears the stories of the things that happen to individuals, specifically women, when walking alone at night. This bill ensures that public transport will be readily available through metro areas at all times. As well, clause 8 states that the safety of walking is going to be increased, specifically in high crime areas, to hopefully remove the danger around walking at night. As a female that lives within metropolitan Melbourne I do not feel safe within my own community walking alone at night, no matter the duration – and I am sure I am not the only one. This bill is here to reduce crime levels and improve the amount of individuals walking in order to reduce emissions in metropolitan areas.

Clause 8 also sets out the help buttons to be used by individuals walking, allowing for the safety of the community to be top priority in this bill. Having these help buttons connected to the local police station will allow for individuals walking to have access to help as soon as possible and discreetly, as one does not need to dial 000. By having these in place, constantly gripping your keys in between your fingers, pretending you are on the phone and crossing to the other side of the road will all be reduced, due to this bill being passed. So I ask the government: how can you refute a bill that helps people feel safer within their community?

**Chase McINTOSH:** In clause 8.3 the opposition talks about help buttons that are to be established on street poles, prioritising high crime areas. There are so many lacking details and confusing decisions in this one clause, I do not know where to start. Are there going to be help buttons on every street, or am I going to have to walk a kilometre to reach one? How are you going to classify high crime areas without creating a class divide? Furthermore, they say that help buttons shall be placed 2 metres high. I do not know about you, Deputy Speaker, but I would struggle to reach that high. Does the opposition believe that a child could reach this high, or a person in a wheelchair? This clause would disproportionately affect young people, women and people with mobility impairments – the people you could argue are at most risk of needing the help button. The opposition says they aim to increase accessibility, but this the opposite, excluding those most in need. And it is not like anyone on their board will speak up about it. Neither gender nor disability are demographics that seem to be considered in the selection of the board.

My last point as to ask how the opposition is planning to prevent misuse of these help buttons. Thousands of prank calls are already made to 000 every month and take up far too much of these vital people's time, yet the

opposition wants to give people up to no good a convenient button, where they are able to do the equivalent of ding-dong ditching without consequences or a way of identifying the culprits. This bill needs to be taken back to the drawing board. Why would we need a stationary, inaccessible button that could be abused when we simply could use a mobile phone?

**Molly MEADOWS:** This bill will provide an increase of transport worker jobs. Jobs for new train, tram and bus drivers will be available. Is this not an issue we would like to improve? Also, with the addition of the additional bike lanes there will be more work for anyone working in construction.

**Helix HAMILTON:** In this bill the term ‘emissions’ is never defined. This seems like an oversight. This is yet another example of how shoddily created this bill is. Emissions can mean anything that is emitted. This could be smog coming out of cars or it could be kids throwing apple cores out of windows. So, unless the opposition has a secret clause 3(d) up their sleeve that the government does not know about, I put it to you that this entire bill can be overturned based on the fact that none of the words in the title of this bill are defined in the bill.

**Maxwell McKELLAR:** I would like to touch on clause 6.5 first, which is that:

A notification system shall be established to alert passengers of delays and disruptions.

As the government said, we do have something like this in place with the Public Transport Victoria app. However, this notification system is terrible. The MyMacca’s app on my iPhone sends better notifications, and I think that is not on.

We need to remember that this bill is about the beginning of emissions reduction in our state. The government talked about how we are only focusing on the metropolitan area. The reason for this is there are so many more travel emissions within our metropolitan area, and a good start is a step towards a better future. That is all from me.

**Estella JAMES:** I would first like to address the point that was just made by the opposition about the notification system used by PTV. If the opposition has an issue with this notification system, why would they not make a bill which improves upon it instead of taking all the time and effort to establish an entirely new system that does exactly the same thing? I am confused as to why the opposition believes that we should be investing our time, money and workforce into the creation of something that already exists.

Furthermore, this bill never bothers to define what a main road is. So, when it tells us that we are adding bike lanes on all newly constructed main roads, which roads are these? Are we adding bike lanes to highways? This bill claims in its abstract that the bill aims to make alternative means of transport more accessible. There are so many parts of this bill that completely fail to do that. Are you making walking more accessible by placing help buttons 2 metres off the ground?

I think that this bill is theoretically a good idea. I think there are clauses in here which could work and could be beneficial to our environment. However, the opposition, I believe, need to think more clearly about what they are writing in order for it to be ultimately effective. How are we supposed to enact a bill reducing emissions if we do not know what emissions are? The opposition claims there are more emissions in metro areas. I might agree, except you do not tell me what emissions are, and I do not know.

**Jasmine TWIGG:** I would like to acknowledge the government’s points. Yes, they are very good points – and well done. But I would like to remind you – because I know some of the speakers are going off topic – the goal of the bill is to reduce travel emissions, not worry about how high off the ground the help buttons are or anything. Anyway, one speaker earlier mentioned, ‘How will emergency services get through heavy traffic?’ There are already rules around emergency services going through heavy traffic; there were already rules before that. But also, someone else mentioned that rural areas are not affected by this bill, because they do not have public transport or something along those lines. I come from a rural town of under 1000 people, and we have trains – very lacking, but we have trains and buses. I heard someone else far away does not have trains, but they still have buses. Is that not public transport?

**Asha SURUJPAL:** If the opposition truly cares about emissions, then have they considered the amount of emissions that will occur as a result of the infrastructure they want developed? Ultimately we believe that the

structures in place should be reformed; however, the amount of reform that they want to do will ultimately counteract the goal.

**Lilly CORRELL:** I encourage the government to read the bill. Let us travel to the abstract. It states that road transport, including cars, light commercial and heavy vehicles, is responsible for approximately 87 per cent of travel emissions. I hope that answers your question, honourable member Campbell. I would now like to highlight the fact that our emissions mainly come from our centralised area, our metropolitan city of Melbourne. We simply do not have as many emissions in regional Victoria due to the fact that we do not have as much transport. Why is this important, you say? Well, if you took 2 seconds to read the bill, you would notice that the title is 'Travel Emission Reduction Strategies Bill'. We are looking to reduce travel emissions. Do I need to hold the government's hand? Do I need to help them cross the road? Well, do not worry, we will be making our roads safer under this bill.

The honourable members in the government state that we need car lanes and that they are worried that adding more bike lanes will therefore create more traffic because it will take away from car lanes. Do I need to remind them of the size of a bike lane compared to a car lane? Do I need to remind them of the practicality of a bike lane? Do I need to remind them that traffic cannot get stuck in a bike lane? Do I need to remind them of the sheer benefit that cycling has and the benefit that this bill will create?

I would also like to highlight the importance of the board. You state that the board does not include 'disability'. I believe that was taken out by the Taskforce. My understanding of the board is that it will be representative. The bill does not say that we are excluding anybody that does not have relevant knowledge. This board is inclusive and diverse, including with age, cultural background, socio-economic status and geographical location. These are qualities that will make up an exceptional board. I will also highlight that the board's role will help implement the transport routes and modes of transport. These people will know what they are talking about, and simply because it is not highlighted does not mean that is not the case. I encourage the government to read the bill.

**Krushnadevsinh RAVALJI:** Young people are gathered in Parliament today, and I would like us to think bigger. I would love to walk to work. I would love to cycle to uni. I would love to catch a bus or a train and it be an easy 20 minutes to work, but unfortunately I live in Werribee, which is far, far away, and I cannot do that. I believe young people need to think bigger. We need to think of more place-based approaches. That is a solution to including regional communities and communities like mine. We need to create opportunities within local centres – for people to go to work, to learn and to study – to reduce travel.

Secondly, we are gathered here today in front of members of the public. I would like every single person on the opposition to think: do we really want to pass a bill today that says we want more buses with high-emitting CO<sub>2</sub> to take over our roads? I think we know the future – which is, electric buses. In this entire bill there is no mention of electrifying our system or electric buses, which have no emissions. I believe that if we want to pass this today, we need to make a statement. We need to think bigger for the public that are here today. We need to say that the future is electric to get things off our road and we need to create things that are more local so we do not have to travel more – that the Victorian public do not have to travel, eliminating the need for travel.

**Dimithri WICKRAMARATNE:** Firstly, it is quite nice for a change to see the government actually provide some constructive criticism, don't you think, guys? It is not often it happens – as much as we would like – but it happens. Look, in all seriousness we do appreciate what you guys are saying. We appreciate the points, and yes, there could be work done on the bill. There is definitely room for improvement, no doubt about that. However, what the government fails to recognise is that the main purpose is to reduce emissions generated on a daily basis and to improve safety. More than that, the government has once again fallen for the folly of the dreaded old mantra: perfection is indeed the enemy of the good.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Before I call the member I just remind members to give their contributions through the Chair.

**Hugo Nawat SOMBOONSIN:** The aim of the opposition, as they have stated in the preamble, is to reduce emissions from transports. I ask them: how are they going to achieve it? They have not mentioned electrification, as the Premier said. They have not mentioned getting electric buses. They have not mentioned extending the rail service to regional areas which used to have it. The rail service, I must remind the opposition,

is more efficient and more emissions efficient. What about a congestion charge? These sorts of measures all reduce emissions, but the opposition have not talked about them. Instead, they talk about 2-metre-high emergency buttons and having a board which has no experts, as far as I can see, on it.

The problem with our public transport system is that for far too long it has been run by people who are unqualified – unqualified politicians, like those opposite, who think they know what is best to reduce emissions. The fact is this bill is utter rubbish. They say there shall be an increased capacity of the public transport system. What does that even mean? What does ‘There shall be an increased capacity’ mean? Let us go on. Let us talk about how they say we are going to address punctuality. How so? They say they are going to have bus lanes, but only at intersections. I question how a bus lane is any help when it is only at an intersection – they are still going to get stuck in traffic. But it is okay, because the opposition also say that buses will be able to divert along side streets to avoid congestion, apparently defeating the point of a bus with fixed stops. Emergency services might have been able to use these bus lanes if they had done it properly – but apparently not.

**Verity ORME:** It seems the government have not done their research. Electric vehicles inadvertently have a climate impact. In fact many academic organisations have reported that the environmental impact of EVs and fossil fuel-based cars is equivalent. Furthermore, as honourable member Driscoll clearly said, this bill is a climate bill. By not taking climate action, we risk more natural disasters like the catastrophic bushfires of 2020. This is one of the best ways that we prevent our people – our children – from losing their very livelihoods.

**Zaralee McAULIFFE-DOUTHAT:** I would like to address the honourable member Twigg’s statement that if the bill is about travel emissions and not about their safety buttons, and they do not want us to point out the obvious flaws with this, why are they attempting to legislate it in the first place? Furthermore, the opposition is trying to do so many things yet is failing at all of them. Instead of directly regulating cars, as they say they wish to do – they wish to get more cars off the road. Instead of directly regulating car travel or subsidising electric vehicles, the opposition has decided to do everything but. They say that the amount of cars on the road is something that they want to reduce, yet there are exactly zero clauses in this bill that directly tackle the amount of cars on the road.

**Julia HUNT:** I would like to draw the house back to clause 1, the purpose of the bill, which is:

To reduce emissions generated through daily commuting by increasing the capacity and efficiency of existing public transport systems;

If the government votes no to this bill, they are voting no to change, voting no to growth and voting no to climate change. In 2020 the emission of CO<sub>2</sub> in Victoria was 83 million tonnes. The government is nitpicking. If they want this bill to be seen in regional and rural areas, they can write their own bill.

**Flora GILLIES:** The opposition continuously fails to acknowledge the fact that emergency services will not be able to reach their destination due to congestion from these new bus lanes. I am not going to get to the hospital in a bus. Considering emergency services are such a crucial part of our society, it is shameful they have not considered how this bill will affect them. Without increasing the appeal of buses while taking away car lanes, it seems the opposition is just creating empty buses and congested lanes. The government does not deny this is a climate bill, we just question the way the opposition has gone about approaching it. As the government has pointed out time and time again, there are so many other ways to address this issue more effectively. The purpose is noble, the bill is not.

**Natasha CORLUKA:** I would like to begin by saying that infrastructure is for the long run and efficiency for the future, so making sacrifices now will be for the greater good. May I also add that electric buses and cars are also already in legislation. Members of the government have claimed that the board is too defined, being described as hand-holding, but if the board was too vague, it would have been argued against. Why is having a well-researched and well-defined board a bad thing? Would the government rather have an undefined board? I urge the government to pick their struggle and not disembark research which they have clearly not done.

**Matilda SECKOLD:** I would like to highlight clause 7.5:

The TER board shall address the safety concerns of bike riding for everyday commuters when sharing roads, including;

...

- (b) Implementing the construction of barriers which separate bike lanes from motor vehicle lanes on busy and high accident roads.

How wide are these barriers going to be? What will they be made of? Construction barriers between bike lanes and motor vehicle lanes on busy and accident-prone roads can impact on visibility and accessibility for emergency services and maintenance vehicles. While these barriers might be a good idea in theory, in practice these barriers will cause more harm than good for all road users.

**Maddison ROBERTS-CASTANO:** Not only does this bill address travel emissions, but another part that this bill addresses that the government has yet to think of is the amount of money individuals will be saving as a result of not using cars. By trading in cars, individuals will be able to save money on fees relating to a car, such as petrol prices, expensive repairs and servicing. Servicing occurs every six months on average for a car. In fact the average individual will spend anywhere between \$200 and \$400 on each service. That is just today's cars. Imagine how much more money individuals will be spending on older cars.

**Quinn Le FEVRE:** What the opposition has failed to realise is that you can dress up walking and you can dress up riding on a silver platter. You can drizzle a little bit of help button over the top of it if you so wish; however, it will not affect people's choices to drive. People make their own choices, not the government.

**Ryan PETERSON:** We have been hearing a great deal of accusations about taking cars off the roads and insufficient infrastructure to support this bill. I direct the house to clause 5.1, which reads:

There shall be an increased capacity of the public transport system ...

Now, this may include passenger numbers on existing services, but is not limited to it. This clause also includes capacity in terms of the reach and span of the public transport system itself. This effectively addresses the government's concerns about the applicability of this bill to regional and rural areas.

Additionally, the honourable Deputy Premier in front of me here notably said that we are ruining family car trips. Now unfortunately, pop culture references and metaphors aside, that argument has all the integrity of a warm lettuce. Considering that a bus used in our public transport network has an average capacity of 40 people, that would take roughly 10 to 20 cars off our roads per bus. Would that not make their weekend trips easier? Speaker, I fail to understand this particular line of questioning. Can the government not see that this would equate to a net reduction in emissions and congestion on our roads.

Finally, on the structure of the board, I must ask, because there has been some interesting conjecture from the honourable members opposite me: who is more qualified to advise on public transport than the people that actually use these services? Speaker, the honourable Deputy Premier has accused the opposition of governmental bureaucracy at its finest. I have to say from this debate it has become evident that it takes one to know one.

**Caitlin BURNS:** I would like to extend on the point raised by the honourable member Surujpal. Whilst I commend the opposition's attempt to reduce emissions throughout Victoria, I would like to touch on a slightly minor detail which is yet to be expanded on – that is, that the further establishment of roads, bike lanes and facilities from this bill will only generate more emissions throughout Victoria through their construction. As the honourable member Surujpal said, 'This will contradict the purpose of this bill.' The consumption of resources and the generation of fossil fuels, greenhouse gases and CO<sub>2</sub> emissions will only grow during the implementation of more roads and lanes. Frankly it is hopeful and wishful thinking for the opposition to assume that the future of this bill will eventually outweigh the emissions stemming from the infrastructure that is implemented currently. This is something we must evaluate before passing this bill, which is yet to be done.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Thank you, members. I call on the sponsor of the bill member Driscoll for their right of reply.

**Madeleine DRISCOLL:** I do not necessarily feel as though the government has understood this bill. Instead, they have focused on semantics hidden under irrelevant metaphors and frankly oddly specific insults. I speak wholeheartedly when I say that I am ashamed. I am ashamed of the fearmongering that this house has been subjected to in an effort to diminish a pivotal issue. I assure the government that you can still drive your car as you require, as we understand people need to do, but when and if you come to look at our public transport system when you want to walk home from a dinner, you will be grateful that you stood beside this bill. You will be glad that people care. This bill does not erase options and it does not remove opportunities; it is creating them.

Transport is the second-highest emitting sector in Victoria – never said it was the first. We are focusing on our state, like every other bill that passes through this house, not on celebrity jets – that is not this state’s problem. This data is from road vehicles and any other planes that operate within the state. Planes are frankly difficult to address, but that is no reason to do nothing. This bill is inspired by a burgeoning issue. It is doing what we can – what we must – do.

Next, onto our board. I shall assure the government that any incidents relating to dodgy drivers shall not be attributed to the travel emissions board. How is it logical to correlate bad driving with a board that does not have anything to do with that – a board that is assessing emissions, a board that is working to better the public transport system and work towards state and federal climate goals? Frankly the notion is as disjointed as the government’s rebuttal.

Now, regional Victoria – we wholeheartedly acknowledge the lack of infrastructure in regional Victoria, but frankly the government is correct: we need to address the unique requirements of regional Victoria. But that is not this bill. This bill focuses on where emissions are focused, and that is unfortunately – or for the better – metropolitan Melbourne. That is not to say that regional areas will not be positively impacted by this bill in areas such as cycling and walking and, where it does exist, public transport. Furthermore, reducing emissions – because that is the goal of this bill – will benefit everyone. It will benefit those who have been victims of climate change.

I would also like to acknowledge the oversight in the height of the button – while irrelevant now, it was not intended to be 2 metres, just for the record. I implore the government to acknowledge the importance of this issue and to move with Victorians. I reiterate: this is a bill about reducing emissions. This is not a bill to fix transport. It is not a bill about public safety. It is at its core a climate bill. I implore that we stand together to support climate change and support our future.

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

That the Travel Emission Reduction Strategies Bill 2023 now be read a second time and a third time.

**Question agreed to.**

**Read second time.**

**Read third time.**

*Members applauded.*

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** No division, then. I was going to lock the doors and everything, so there you go. That was great. It is very good to see this room full and pretty respectful, which was very good.

Before, when I mentioned how I got here, I talked about getting into politics because of my kids and the world we were going to leave them, and of course we have just spent close to an hour talking about the effects of climate change on the world that I will leave before you do, let us hope. Those are decisions that are made in this house, so I applaud all of you for your contributions. I would ask you – to give you all some homework, at the risk of being unpopular – how many of you here have talked to, emailed or called your local state member of Parliament, ever? There are a few. Good. Keep that up. For the rest of you, it is our job to listen.

In my electorate there are 50-something thousand people that I represent. They did not all vote for me, obviously. Luckily for me, more than half preferred me, which is good. It is my job to represent them all regardless – and there will be things that I agree with and there will be things that I do not agree with, just like you have been doing today. Debating the finer points of the bill and reading the clauses was refreshing – thank you.

I just think this is going to be your world for a lot longer than it is going to be mine. It is up to you – it is up to people in my position to do our job, but it is also up to you to keep us accountable. I encourage you all, when you leave this Youth Parliament and you have had a great time, to make sure that your voice is heard, however that be. The worst thing that can happen is nothing. The best thing that can happen is some change, and you get to think, ‘Yes, I put my voice in there.’ And then maybe it takes a week or maybe it takes five years, but if you see that change – so thank you and congratulations on hopefully what has been an enjoyable week for you all.

*Members applauded.*

**Krushnadevsinh RAVALJI:** Deputy Speaker, if I may, on behalf of youth parliamentarians, thank you so much for a great debate. It is getting better. We have got two more debates up, so I am very excited for that. Thank you to all the clerks for all the stuff that you do behind the scenes; we really appreciate it. Taskforce members, thanks for writing the letters. Members of the public youth press gallery, we really appreciate you joining in. We do have two more debates. Feel free to stay tuned; it is going to get even better than that. And lastly, Deputy Speaker Fregon, thank you so much for taking time out of your busy day to share some wisdom with us. We really appreciate it. Thank you so much.

*Members applauded.*

**Sitting suspended 11:47 am until 12:01 pm.**

**The ACTING SPEAKER (Tim Read):** Welcome, everybody. I will just briefly introduce myself. My name is Tim Read. I am the MP for Brunswick. I normally sit in the back row up there – yes, right there. I was first elected in 2018, so this is my fifth year in this place. I am one of four Greens in this chamber – we have four in the upper house as well – and one of the few who is close enough to ride his bike to Parliament. The member for Mildura sits in front of me and flies in, so we compare notes. I was actually a doctor treating patients and then found myself here at the end of 2018; I have not written a prescription since. I guess while it was climate change that propelled me into Parliament, it could be any number of things that might well be driving you to get involved in community representation.

I think the most important thing is, whatever you end up doing, do not forget about your state Parliament. The politics is reported. For better or worse, we see it through the prism of the media, and they tend to portray federal Parliament as a bit of a Punch and Judy show, but it is obviously a lot more complicated than that. State politics misses out, but we are the ones that really run the show here. So do not forget about raising issues with your state MP, because we learn from what our constituents are telling us. Whatever you do – you are obviously already quite politically engaged – do not get disheartened. It is always a case of finding out how you can get involved, according to your stage in life, and always working with the least worst political party is probably the goal, rather than anything else. Let us get started. I call on the sponsor of the bill.

**Krushnadevsinh RAVALJI:** Acting Speaker, on behalf of youth parliamentarians, could I please request permission for jackets to be taken off?

**The ACTING SPEAKER:** Yes, I am perfectly happy for jackets to be taken off.

### **Limitation of Gambling Advertising Bill 2023**

**Sponsor:** Buloke–Loddon

**Refuter:** Wyndham City Council

*Introduction and first reading*

**Julia HUNT:** I move:

That I introduce a bill titled Limitation of Gambling Advertising Bill 2023.

**Motion agreed to.**

**Read first time.**

*Second reading*

**Julia HUNT:** I move:

That the bill be now read a second time.

Before I start I would like to let everyone know that today's debate involves the issue of gambling-related problems, including addiction and mental health struggles, which can be distressing for some. If anyone feels uncomfortable, please feel free to step out of the room for a moment.



In Australia gambling addiction is a major challenge that affects individuals and families all over the country. It not only causes serious financial difficulties but also takes a toll on our mental and emotional wellbeing. Recent studies have shown a troubling connection between gambling addiction and higher rates of depression and anxiety and an alarming high rate of suicide. Television is a main source of gambling advertising, with around 20 per cent of all TV ads during prime time being related to or promoting gambling.

Let me share some important statistics. A recent study conducted by La Trobe University for the Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation revealed public opinion on this issue. An astonishing 78 per cent of respondents believed that TV sport should not have gambling ads. Even more concerning, a staggering 87 per cent expressed worry about teenagers being exposed to too much gambling advertising.

Our bill aims to limit gambling advertising in Victoria by creating the gambling advertising board, GAB. The main purpose of the bill is to reduce the financial, mental and emotional strain caused by gambling-related issues. Research has shown that young people are particularly vulnerable to gambling ads. Being exposed to these ads increases the chance of developing gambling-related problems later in life. By enforcing strict regulations and limiting exposure to these ads we can protect our youth and break the cycle of addiction. The GAB will play a crucial role in enforcing these limits. It will make sure that broadcasters follow strict guidelines, such as not airing gambling ads between 5 am and 10 pm and allowing only one ad per break per channel during the permitted time. Additionally, exemptions for gambling advertising will be reviewed and issued annually, allowing venues that apply the ability to advertise appropriately and within the physical walls of the venue only.

In the six-month transition period after the bill is passed, all current gambling advertisements will be stopped. This period will allow us to thoroughly evaluate the impact of these ads on our society and make well-informed decisions. Online platforms and streaming services will also need to follow these rules, effectively putting an end to intrusive pop-up ads related to gambling. To ensure compliance, penalties will be imposed on gambling advertisers who break the rules. These penalties will include forfeiting 35 per cent of the venue's monthly revenue, a two-week complete closure of the venue and the removal of exemption status for the venue if it was previously exempt. These strict measures will act as a strong deterrent, encouraging advertisers to follow the rules outlined in this bill.

However, it is important to emphasise the need for ongoing evaluation and review processes. The GAB will work closely with the Victorian Gambling and Casino Control Commission, VGCCC, to conduct an annual assessment. This comprehensive review will cover various aspects, such as examining exempt venues, assessing new exemption applications and analysing the penalties issued in the past 12 months.

In conclusion, this bill demonstrates our unwavering commitment to reducing the harmful impact of gambling addiction on our communities. By limiting the exposure of vulnerable populations, especially young people, to the negative influence of gambling advertising we can alleviate financial burdens, protect mental and emotional wellbeing, prevent new individuals from falling into the trap of gambling, and support the recovery of long-term gamblers. Together we possess the power to create a healthier and more responsible gambling environment. By limiting gambling advertising and establishing the gambling advertising board we are taking a significant stride toward a brighter future.

**Hugo Nawat SOMBOONSIN:** The opposition is putting forward a bill to limit gambling advertising. I must stress that point: they are going on about gambling advertising. We have seen the bill before us, and fundamentally we believe that this is an issue not of tackling the advertising but of the deep-rooted issues surrounding gambling. It is an issue of choice. It is an issue of self-control. It is an issue of gambling rather than gambling advertisers. It is an issue where we must address other things that are not just gambling advertising and also consider the consequences of this bill, the flow-on effects of this bill, that the opposition have failed to consider.

Let us first consider what exactly it is that the opposition are trying to achieve. The preamble to this bill states that by stopping gambling advertising it will reduce financial, mental, emotional stress et cetera. First and foremost, it is about advertising; it is not about the gambling. What about existing gamblers? Existing gamblers will continue to gamble. Like I said, it is an issue of self-control. It is issue of ensuring that people have the education and knowledge to know when to stop. We ought to educate our children and the public at large on what gambling is and how it may affect people. We ought not to limit gambling advertising just for the sake of

it. And by the way, I might add that the bill says that advertising for gambling will be allowed inside the venues. It will remain inside the venues targeting the vulnerable who are already accustomed to going to those venues – and might I remind you that oftentimes gambling venues also feature drinks, so you are preying on the vulnerable, the drunk. This is the sort of thing that needs to be addressed and which the opposition have clearly not considered in the writing of this bill.

What about the economy? They want a six-month break from advertising, which is completely arbitrary, and we must consider also the revenue and the contributions to the Victorian economy that gambling provides – 200,000 jobs, \$6 billion. Do you want to stop this? I say not.

What about informed consent? Like I said, it is an issue of freedom of choice. With gambling advertising completely stopped, how will people be able to have the freedom to make their own decisions on what to do with their lives? I feel that venturing into banning gambling advertising entirely verges on the realm of censorship.

Now, let us address the online ads, because they have mentioned online ads. We acknowledge that online gambling ads exist, and they may or may not be a problem. But telecommunications is a federal responsibility. This is a state legislature. Might I also remind you streaming platforms, most of them – particularly the most popular one, Netflix – are foreign. They are foreign to our country. How do you intend to regulate a federal and/or international issue within a state legislature? It is not going to be possible. Overseas ads – you might as well, you know, become the United Nations.

What about the contribution that gambling has to our communities? What about ads for things that are considered technically gambling, like the Royal Melbourne Hospital lottery? The raffles – are you going to ban online ads or school fetes distributing flyers for a raffle? Are you going to ban primary schools from giving away chocolates?

This is an infringement on our right to freedom of choice. It is preying on the vulnerable. It is, quite frankly, not well thought out. Yes, there are problems with gambling; I can acknowledge that and I can accept that. I know someone who personally suffers from it. But this bill will not address any of those problems.

**Jasmine TWIGG:** Compared to many other countries, Australia is behind when it comes to limiting gambling advertisements. The government fails to recognise the actions other countries have taken to decrease the frequency of gambling advertisements to the public eye. In Italy gambling advertisements are all banned, whether it is social media influencers or public posters. Belgium from next month onwards will be the same. In the United Kingdom any gambling companies are required to gain a special gambling-based licence in order to advertise to English audiences. They have also put in place a code when it comes to gambling advertisements which ensures that gambling adverts do not include any of the following, media that: encourages gambling behaviour that could lead to gambling-related harm; makes use of the inexperience of under-18s; suggests that gambling can be the solution to financial problems; links gambling to sexual attractiveness; or gives members of the public under 18 an interest in the industry. And these adverts cannot include anyone who is or appears to be under the age of 25.

Our local neighbour of South Australia is ahead of the country when it comes to gambling advertisements. Their code for gambling advertisements includes that it is not able to include minors or mention that a player's ability can increase or decrease the probability of a win. The code also includes how the terms 'win' and 'money'/'cost' can be used, how blackout intervals are meant to be used when broadcasting on television and radio services and ensures that the advertising is not false or misleading.

This is the way my team wishes Victoria to be in the future.

**Krushnadevsinh RAVALJI:** Peter Drucker, change manager and thinker, once said:

We do not need more laws. No country suffers from a shortage of laws. We need a new model.

The Australasian Gaming Council has stated that in 2019–20, \$6 billion of tax revenue was received by the Australian government, which we used for good. In the economy \$17 billion is added to our economy annually. This gambling industry employs 200,000 people, not just people but families, young children and the vulnerable.

Do we do our part too, you might ask. The Victorian government last year donated \$150 million in grants to those in need due to gambling addiction. I would like to bring everyone's attention to clause 5.1, which states:

All current gambling advertisements shall be ceased for a six-month period.

Why six months? Where does this come from? There is no point about how we are going to get these adverts back up again. Will the government have to invest more money to get gambling advertisements back on the road? Absolutely not, from what the opposition is saying. This will result in a direct loss of tax revenue, driving a loss of jobs and negatively impacting the community. We need a new model.

Clause 7, 'Penalties' – where do these penalties come from? If an advertiser breaches these, each fine will include a forfeit of 35 per cent of the venue's revenue, a two-week complete shutdown of the venue and venue operations and exempt venues will forfeit their exemption. Where do these crazy penalties come from?

Imagine the RSLs, loyal communities and local parks that will suffer from this. Again I would like to remind everyone – we do not need more laws. No country suffers from a shortage of laws. We need a new model, and this is not it. (*Time expired*)

**Lennon JABLONKA:** Before I begin, I would like to advise the house that this speech alone contains brief allusions to smoking and cancer. If you would like to leave the chamber, I insist you do so now.

I think that we as a house can all agree that one of the best ways to stop cancer is to cut it out completely, and that is what our bill aims to do. Gambling advertising is just that – a cancer on our society constantly snapping away young lives and promising future endeavours, ultimately condemning vulnerable people from the next generation to debt and despair.

However, in our bill we present a solution: a total, absolute ban on all advertising for a six-month period. By implementing this ban, we predict a drastic reduction in the rate of new gamblers, particularly those turning 18, within a six-month period, as there will be significantly less societal pressure to gamble without the incessant ads on TV – approximately 1000 per day under current conditions, which we would be reducing to zero. Another analogy for this period would be quitting cold turkey, which according to the Australian government Department of Health and Aged Care is one of the most, if not the most, effective way to stop an addiction, and indeed this would likely carry across to gambling. After all, these advertisements are engineered to, in a way, be addictive – to get that little hint of dopamine every time you are reminded of gambling and make you want more. By completely cutting everyone's access to gambling advertising, this potential trigger for a desire to gamble is eliminated. Sure, this period may not be to everyone's taste. The advertisers and networks would not be a fan, as those some 1000 ads per day would generate potentially millions of dollars in revenue and that would be eliminated for six months. But, government, I plead with you to ask yourselves: do you want to protect the companies preying on the vulnerable or do you want to protect the vulnerable people?

**Asha SURUJPAL:** Before I begin, I would like to echo the content warning and re-emphasise that I will be discussing gambling addictions.

The act of gambling is not an issue until it has reached the point of becoming an addiction. As such, we the government would like to alternatively suggest that the opposition look at the root of gambling addictions. Through better awareness and education on how to gamble responsibly, we can handle this epidemic better. What the opposition is suggesting is an oppressive bandaid solution that will not change anything for those already suffering from gambling addictions. While they acknowledge that the removal of advertising will stop newer generations from developing an addiction, I would like to highlight that the removal of gambling advertising is not what draws pre-existing gamblers in – it is their addiction.

Education and prevention are the only ways the opposition should consider addressing the issue of gambling addictions. To quote the great Kenny Rogers, some people don't 'know when to walk away and know when to run' from their gambling addictions. Quite plainly, what the opposition is suggesting is not good enough to truly help those suffering from it. Education, intervention and prevention awareness are the only ways to safeguard a community from this disease. I repeat: the act of gambling is not harmful; it is people's susceptibility to developing addictions due to a lack of accessible education awareness and information. I implore the opposition to tackle this disease at its root. Everything is okay in moderation, so we need to provide resources to help Victorians use this pastime and leisure activity safely and responsibly. It is our duty to stop it

at its root – prevention and intervention. It is the only way to reduce gambling addictions and its associated risks.

**Verity ORME:** A key attribute of any bill is how pragmatic it is to enforce. This is exactly what clause 4 covers in a direct but distinctively thorough way. Clause 4.1 states that:

The Gambling Advertising Board (GAB) shall be established.

The GAB will oversee and enforce the formalities of this bill, such as buying gambling advertisements during the day as well as issuing fines and venue exceptions. The GAB will also work in conjunction with the VGCCC to streamline regulations and procedures. We are aware that there may be concerns over the implementation of this bill, but that is exactly why we have this clause. Saving our future generations from indoctrination into a deadly gambling culture does not have to be hard. In fact it can be straightforward and painless with our bill. Having an all-encompassing bureaucratic body is essential to remove the source of one of the scariest problems in modern society – to think that 30 per cent of people who go to watch the AFL, who have gambling posters and advertised shoved in their face, are under 18.

Nobody wants their child exposed to gambling advertisements, to be indoctrinated into spiralling addiction when trying to engage in a fun family tradition like going to the footy. This bill may seem drastic, but it is the drastic action that we need to prevent gambling harm. I want to convey that drastic does not always have to mean unachievable. We can do this, and we need to do this. Together we can defeat the monster who has plagued countless lives and ripped apart families. This monster is called gambling, and the weapon it wields is advertisements. But we have the power to take away its weapons.

**Raidah PARVEZ:** Freedom is a cornerstone of our democratic society – freedom of speech, freedom of expression, freedom of choice. Gambling advertisements, like any other form of commercial speech, should be protected under these principles. Imposing restrictions on such advertisements could set a dangerous precedent for restricting freedom of expression in other areas of society. If the opposition plans on limiting ads, what will they limit next – political campaigns? It is crucial that we preserve individuals' rights to make informed monetary and personal decisions and that we preserve companies' rights to promote their products and services, including gambling.

Furthermore, consumer choice lies at the heart of our market-driven economy. Limiting gambling advertisements would restrict consumers' access to information about the gambling options available to them. By allowing these advertisements to exist, individuals are empowered to make choices based on their own preferences and inclinations. Consumers should have the freedom to evaluate the risks, benefits and entertainment value associated with gambling activities on their own, and advertising plays a crucial role in informing them. We should have the freedom to engage in legal activities such as gambling if we so choose. Limiting gambling advertisements infringes upon our autonomy by assuming that individuals are incapable of making informed choices or managing their own behaviours. It is crucial to trust one's capacity to evaluate the risks and benefits of gambling and make decisions that align with one's personal values and desires.

Preserving our freedom in the realm of gambling advertisements is essential for maintaining a democratic and inclusive society. Restricting these advertisements would not only undermine our fundamental rights but also hinder our ability to make informed choices. Thus preserving freedom of expression in gambling advertisements is vital for upholding democratic values, promoting public discourse, fostering economic growth, ensuring public accountability and recognising artistic expression.

**Maxwell McKELLAR:** I am going to be talking about the penalties within this bill. I would like to use the analogy of the carrot and the stick. If someone does something right, we reward it. That is the case in this bill. If the businesses and venues follow the rules outlined in our bill on gambling advertising, they can be rewarded with the – one second, let me get the correct wording. My apologies.

**A member** interjected.

**Maxwell McKELLAR:** I am reading the bill – thank you very much. I am sorry. The GAB endorses it – sorry, they need to advertise it. My apologies for forgetting about our bill.

Either way these penalties are 35 per cent forfeiture of their monthly income from the advertiser, two weeks shutdown for non-compliant venues and revoking of the exemptions – that is what I was looking for – from the

GAB or the VGCCC in relation to gambling. We need to slow and stop gambling advertising to stop more addicts. Yes, the government says, we do have addicts – that is not what this bill is addressing. This bill is stopping our youth from growing into gambling addicts. Gambling addiction causes mental health problems. This bill can stop people from losing family members to gambling and losing their friends.

**Zaralee McAULIFFE-DOUTHAT:** This bill seems single-minded and short-sighted. I believe that the opposition has not given proper consideration to the widespread effects that it will have on our communities. Utilising such strict rules and regulations to restrict gambling advertising, they have done so without providing provisions that protect our charity organisations and small community raffles, and this appears to me to be a problem. The Victorian Gambling and Casino Control Commission does include raffles as a form of gambling. You pay money to enter a free-draw competition with no guarantee that you will get anything in return. The hope is that you will. It is a game of chance and pure luck and not a game of skill, thus it is classified as gambling. Under the definition included in this bill it seems that charities and fundraisers will not be able to advertise their raffle efforts using flyers, using Facebook or even using TV ads. This is a massive oversight.

Furthermore, under their broad and non-specific definition of gambling, the lottery, and Powerball even, could not be aired on TV and advertised except between 10 pm and 5 am. They are even affected by the opposition's proposed venue exemption clause. For example, my local lotto store has an open storefront – anyone can peer inside at any time – so even the utilisation of requiring all stores to keep their advertisements within their walls would still not solve the problem. Everyone could still see the advertisements. As such, I feel that this bill needs more proper consideration about how it will affect widespread community programs.

**Molly MEADOWS:** As mentioned previously, our bill aims to establish a six-month period of a total gambling advertising ban – that is, no TV advertising, no physical advertising, no social media advertising. Anything that promotes gambling will be banned. However, we can be realistic about this. We know that totally removing the industry is unsustainable. After all, the revenue that it generates is huge for the Australian economy. In fact gambling advertisers alone spent \$287 million across all media between the years of 2010 to 2021. That is an extra \$20 million per year split across TV networks, social media and so much more. Because of this our bill does not seek to totally eliminate gambling advertising; rather, it aims to bring it back to a more healthy and sustainable form.

If the house would turn their eyes to clause 5.2, they would see that our bill, after the six-month period, does four things. It eliminates ads between 5 am and 10 pm, it completely ceases all pop-up ads online, it limits advertising to only one ad per break per channel or streaming service within the allowed times and it gives the GAB the ability to issue venue exemptions. These four components of the bill are, in our opinion, vitally important to make gambling advertising a safer, less-damaging industry. The first three have a clear, shared purpose: they are to protect the most vulnerable in our society from the temptations of gambling. Children, working families and the elderly will be significantly less likely to see gambling advertisements, as they will be broadcast infrequently and only outside the likely time period for these groups to be awake. The fourth point serves a different purpose. By issuing venue exemptions the bill aims to create the safest, most regulated possible space for gambling and gambling advertising, which will likely significantly reduce the likelihood of many gambling-related harms occurring.

**Flora GILLIES:** In this bill the opposition has made the naive assumption that those who gamble now will not find other, less-regulated ways to gamble after this bill is implemented. The opposition has failed to learn from past mistakes, so I will recount certain mistakes for them. Since the 1860s smoking was an essential part of the Australian lifestyle, and the smoko was a nationally renowned break. Similar to a Friday night drink and trip to the pokies, smoking was viewed as an indispensable part of the Australian lifestyle. But in the early 1990s it was decided that smoking was no longer a welcome part of Australian society, and through negative advertising it was pushed from the public eye view. But despite not having a prettier scene to look at, those who became addicted when it was popular and acceptable, those who became addicted through generational addiction, were still suffering. The aim of this negative advertising was to deter new smokers, and – in the way the bill does – it failed to address those who were already addicted. It was thought that we could have had a smokeless society, but all those who thought that failed to address basic economic theory. The theory of substitute goods states that when consumers cannot access a good they will use one that is similar in its place. In the case of smoking this is vaping, and instead of being a smokeless society, Australia has a culture of vaping. In the case of gambling this substitute good comes in the form of online gambling, black markets and shady loopholes. Anything that can be gambled or advertise it will be used.

It is not enough to say, 'Don't throw your money away at casinos and pokies.' To deter people from gambling the opposition must find the motives behind why people are willing to throw away their money and redirect those motives. Only then will this bill be effective. In the wise words of ABBA, 'The history book on the shelf is always repeating itself.' I think the opposition could learn a lot from that. Where smoking failed, the opposition has a chance to succeed, but they are yet to do so.

**Natasha CORLUKA:** I would like to begin by saying isn't the government arguing that plain cigarette packaging did not work? This bill achieves a similar result, as gambling did not work. I would like to highlight the effect that limiting advertising has on especially vulnerable individuals. By this I do not mean the young people with impressionable minds. I am talking about those who are homeless, those without jobs and even those who have not gambled before. The glorification of gambling ads is absolutely disgusting, giving these individuals false hopes of winning. The cycle of presenting gambling as such an easy and efficient way to make money makes me absolutely sick. Even though gambling contributes to our economy, it is at the expense of vulnerable individuals. So does this even benefit Australia? Or is it just a selfish government incentive, to get their hands on more money? Overall this bill does not aim to address or limit gambling, yet it aims to limit the horrific glorification that comes with this twisted sport. If government members wish to address gambling in and of itself, which they clearly seem to do, I urge them to create their own bill, as it is not the point of this bill.

**Estella JAMES:** I would like to discuss how the provision of venue exemptions within this bill allows for the most vulnerable people, the people who are suffering from addiction, to be subject to gambling advertisements. If we turn to clause 6, clause 6.1(a) states that:

The board shall issue venue exemptions;

- (a) All gambling advertising shall strictly be present inside the enclosed walls of the venue.

If we flick back to the definitions, then:

*Gambling venues* means any location in which gambling is conducted, such as casinos, bars, and sporting venues;

Therefore every single venue outlined will have the ability to apply for a venue exemption. This means that by allowing advertising inside a venue such as Crown, we are targeting those who need help the very most. I ask the opposition to consider that if we truly want to address gambling advertising and its connection with addiction, then why are we allowing for this oversight? Additionally, several venues included in this exemption system, such as sporting venues or bars, do not even focus primarily on gambling. To address the honourable member Orme's example, they talked about how 30 per cent of people who go to the AFL and who have gambling advertisements shoved in their face are 18. I ask you: is this stopped under this bill? Because under venue exemptions these same sporting venues can apply to have an exemption and cannot apply to advertise to the people who go to the venues, including those who are under 18. There is nothing saying that venues who serve patrons under 18 cannot apply for an exemption. If the opposition truly cares about limiting gambling adverts in combating addiction, then why does this clause exist? We should be taking steps to help those with addiction, and it seems the opposition agrees. Therefore this clause, which allows for venues to advertise to their most vulnerable patrons, should not exist.

**Maddison ROBERTS-CASTANO:** With the limitation of gambling advertisements it will reduce the risk that individuals fall for fraud and scam attempts, which many people fall victim to. There are plentiful advertisements that urge individuals to take a gamble on their finances on gambling services, which are in fact lying. They take an individual's money and then harm the future of said individuals financially.

**Quinn Le FEVRE:** I have one question for the opposition: who is the GAB? Are they professionals? I ask this simply because it does not specify it in the bill. The opposition has done an amazing job describing what the GAB will do but have failed at every point to describe who will be doing these things. Furthermore I would like to call the house's attention to clause 6.2:

Exemptions shall be reviewed based on an application process.

But they have failed again to describe what this application process is. Moreover, the clauses in this bill benefit only the new generation, and currently addicted Victorians are left alone in the dark. Do the opposition not care about the pre-existing Victorians with addiction?

**Ryan PETERSON:** I find myself confused by the government. The honourable members opposite me claim to see more use in working on an outright ban on gambling rather than its advertising. Then they say that we do not need more laws. The honourable members also state that our bill preys on the vulnerable. Then the government state the contribution that gambling has on the economy by – and correct me if I am mistaken – preying on the vulnerable. The arguments of the members of the government are spinning round and round like a ball on a roulette wheel. There is no consistent line; there are only contradictions.

Like the honourable members before me I would also like to quote Kenny Rogers: ‘Know when to hold ‘em, know when to fold ‘em.’ I think we all know which one the government should be doing. I encourage the government to show their cards and let the house see they have a losing hand.

**Alice TILSON:** Under this bill bingo is considered gambling. Does the opposition really wish to take away one of the few sources of community the elderly have? We have forced onto them constant technology changes, and this is one of the last few consistencies in their lives. Do we really wish to take that away too? I also ask you to consider: what about RSLs, which rely on revenue from gambling to keep veterans – who have sacrificed their mental and physical health for the freedom of Australia – fed and housed? The opposition is taking away their source of revenue while providing no support for them. The definition and scope of this bill shows an enormous lack of consideration for those whom their broad definitions may detrimentally impact.

**Zariah WEBB:** The opposition wants the government to acknowledge that this bill is helpful, as those recovering from gambling addictions can be severely triggered by these ads and forced back into relapse. I would like to ask the government what is more important: how gambling affects the economy or the mental health of citizens of Victoria? Individuals who have gambling addictions already know their options when it comes to gambling. So why do we need to encourage gambling advertisements when this will reduce the amount of new gambling addicts? I say to the government: what would you rather, money or healthy-minded citizens?

**Helix HAMILTON:** I would like to cover a few things that the opposition has brought up. Firstly, honourable member Twigg spoke of the gambling advertising policies of Italy, Belgium and the UK. May I remind the opposition that we are in the Victorian state Parliament, not the federal Parliament? Thus these case studies can be thrown aside, as they all relate to federal policies.

Next, I would like for you to think of the protests that will occur in the six-month blackout period that the opposition is planning to put in place. As Victoria has seen in recent months, protests are becoming an increasing risk to peace and security in our state. I hypothesise that the temporary banning of gambling advertising will create intense and dangerous protests that will threaten both the effectiveness of this bill and the social cohesion of Victoria.

I would like to also point out the contradiction between clauses 5.2(a) and 5.2(b). They seem to be at complete odds with each other. Clause 5.2(a) says gambling ads are banned between 5 am and 10 pm. A clause later, suddenly gambling ads are allowed back in between 5 and 10. Make it make sense, opposition.

**Madeleine DRISCOLL:** I implore the government to use their common sense and their compassion. Long-term gamblers are addicted. Let us treat this issue as such. Let us prevent this. This is a government looking to profit over others’ addictions, but do not worry because they will reinvest a wildly negligible proportion back into the community they are exploiting, as the Premier aptly noted – how very altruistic. This is a government that is scared that people will not fall victim to gambling when this issue is taken seriously, so I ask the house: where do we draw the line? Where will we draw this line today? At what point is money dirty money?

If the government cares, they will stand by this bill. This bill is breaking a cycle, a cycle that is ruining lives. It is changing how young people are exposed to gambling, how those who are susceptible are exposed. This is a first step, one of many we must take, but this is the bill being proposed today, and I strongly believe that we have a moral obligation to make change, and today change starts here.

**Chase McINTOSH:** The opposition include regulation of online pop-up ads and streaming platforms in their bill yet make no mention of online free-to-play games, a huge issue particularly with young people of the day – games that involve gambling-style mini games that encourage the use of real money. How can the opposition think it is okay to speak on online ads without regulating the advertising of these games that are a gateway for children without access to money to fall into gambling addiction in their adulthood?

**Lilly CORRELL:** I would firstly like to head to clause 5. Clause 5.2(a) states that gambling advertisements shall not be issued between the hours of 5 am and 10 pm, and clause 5.2(b) states that it shall be allowed between the hours of 10 pm and 5 am. These are two completely different times. There is continuity in the bill.

I have to point out the hypocrisy of this government. Speaker, one moment they are endorsing gambling ads, calling them great for the economy, yet the next they say we are not doing enough. Where do we draw the line? Where do we say that dirty money is good money? Where do we say that? Because that is what the government is saying. We need to stand up. We need to stop and think of the people in the pokies, people in our sporting clubs, people in our venues.

I will make a reference to smoking. The honourable member Gillies has stated that smoking did not work, that banning advertisements did not work. How many of us are exiting the chamber to go on a smoko? What has been mentioned in this house is the hypocrisy of the government, the blatant lies and blatant mistruths that they portray. I would like to highlight that gambling and limitation of gambling advertising will only fulfil our economy by having happier people, stronger people and putting faith back into our community.

**Angelo von MÖLLER:** I want to preface this by saying that this bill has good intentions. I would like to draw the house's attention to clause 5.2:

- (c) Gambling pop-up ads shall be ceased on all online platforms indefinitely;

and

- (d) Online streaming platforms shall also adhere to one gambling related advert per break.

Like Disney with the *Star Wars* sequel series, the opposition has failed to notice the significant contradictions in this bill. This bill fails to take into account online Instagram accounts dedicated to ads, as well as international websites, sponsored content, YouTube ads and livestreaming websites in which all of these either do not fit into the realm of pop-up ads or are one of the above-listed online platforms – and I repeat, YouTube, Instagram and live streaming sites et cetera – where we cannot limit the number of ads.

Unfortunately those opposite will not be able to shout 'bingo' today.

**Sophie CHEN:** It appals me that the opposition believe that gambling advertising will not change anything. How many teenagers or even adults are trapped in an incessant cycle of addiction, how many teenagers are desperately wanting to quit but feel pressure not to because they are constantly exposed to enthralling ads or people talking about said ads that are being shoved in their faces? Put a fish in a toxic environment and it will get sick. Just like people, we need to remove the factors that create this toxic hype around gambling and finally draw the line. Also, are we going to reject the idea of restricting gambling simply because it undermines freedom of speech? Freedom of speech is the ability to express one's opinions, to have access to all perspectives and media. Freedom of speech is not a matter of life and death, such as gambling is. As honourable member McKellar has stated, just how many family members have lost loved ones due to gambling? How many teenagers have thrown away their youth and their dreams, just to bet? We will not let the weak argument of freedom of speech let more people suffer. We need to suppress gambling promotion. If we can save at least one individual from joining this toxic sport, then this bill is indisputable.

**Jamie CAMPBELL:** The honourable member Correll brought up the government's supposed neglect of the people in the pokies venues. But the idea of going into a six-month blanket ban on gambling advertisements means blanket bans for other people in these venues – the staff. The motive of a six-month blanket gambling ban is honourable, but the all-in approach feels ill-considered when we consider the massive strain that the hospitality industry has been put under in these COVID years. I think we need a better approach that can better support our hospitality industry, as many of these venues are not purely focused on gambling.

**Yuwaluxshayan KANNAN:** Before I start I would just like to say this. Yes, sports venues and other venues are allowed to apply, but the government is making basis assumptions that they will be accepted. I would like to bring up two things, the first being a piece of popular news. \$400,000 was stolen from a school over 10 years due to gambling addiction – let me repeat that: gambling addiction. The second thing is: where does gambling addiction and gambling stem from? Advertisements. Put one and one together. The government should understand that by limiting gambling advertisements we can increase the welfare of our community.



Let us not focus on gambling, because we all know that it is horrible and that it is not the focus of the bill. The focus is limiting advertisements. Clearly the government has missed the point and been yapping on. The focus here is not gambling and how good it is for the economy – it is stopping addiction. It seems that the government does not care about our citizens but only the economy. But one thing is that monies not spent on gambling will be spent on other things. This not only keeps the economy going but also ensures that money is spent on good things.

The government thinks that we are stopping gambling altogether. We are not. Yes, there are penalties for not following the laws. We aim to reduce addiction and to increase welfare. We want the best for our new generation, our future leaders. If the government wishes to continue gambling addiction, to ruin the futures of many, so be it, but we will not stand for it. Limiting these advertisements will just be a stepping stone for a healthier community and a healthier economy.

**The ACTING SPEAKER:** I call on the sponsor of the bill.

**Julia HUNT:** I would just like to reiterate that the aim of this bill is not to ban gambling. We know that is quite impossible and way out of our league to do so. However, what we can do is reduce the amount of gambling advertising on mainstream media. We understand there will be limitations on advertising and marketing, which would affect our economy, but at the end of the day our people's wellbeing comes first. However well reasoned and researched the government's arguments may be, we cannot deny the need for this bill to be implemented for the future of all Victorians.

**The ACTING SPEAKER:** The question is:

That the Limitation of Gambling Advertising Bill 2023 now be read a second time and a third time.

**Question agreed to.**

**Read second time.**

**Read third time.**

*Members applauded.*

**The ACTING SPEAKER:** Order! – I have always wanted to say that. I was expecting a division. I was hanging out to ring the bells. That was a really high standard debate. What was very interesting was that there are a whole lot of people in the chamber. With bill debates here the chamber is nearly deserted and a lot of people – well, some – I think watch it on their screens, so it was really interesting to see actual debate where people were, particularly later on in the proceedings, refuting each other's arguments, which I thought you all did very well. I thought that the negative side had the harder job, given the content of the bill, so a particular shout-out to, I think it was, the government, who was trying to defeat this bill. All the speakers did a great job, but I was particularly impressed by some of the rebuttals. Trying to argue in support of gambling advertising is a tough gig. Well done, everybody. I thought it was a very high standard.

**Dimithri WICKRAMARATNE:** Acting Speaker, on behalf of the chamber, I would like to thank you for your service today. Again on behalf of the chamber, I would like to thank the press gallery up there for attending our debates. Also on behalf of the chamber, I would like to thank Taskforce members and the clerks for all the work you have done for us – for your service. Thank you so much.

*Members applauded.*

**Sitting suspended 12:56 pm until 1:46 pm.**

## **Bullying Intervention and Prevention in Schools Bill 2023**

**Sponsor:** Wellington Shire Council

**Refuter:** Hoppers Crossing Secondary College

### *Introduction and first reading*

**Zaralee McAULIFFE-DOUTHAT:** I move:

That I introduce a bill titled Bullying Intervention and Prevention in Schools Bill 2023.

**Motion agreed to.**

**Read first time.**

**Krushnadevsinh RAVALJI:** Acting Speaker, on behalf of youth parliamentarians, could I please request permission to be granted for jackets to be taken off?

**The ACTING SPEAKER (Kim O’Keeffe):** Yes, absolutely. That is fine.

### *Second reading*

**Zaralee McAULIFFE-DOUTHAT:** I move:

That the bill be now read a second time.

Before I begin I would like to offer a content warning: for discussions about self-inflicted death and the effect of bullying on young people’s mental health, noting that the honourable member Green’s speech, in particular, touches on this especially, so feel free to leave the chamber before that point.

It is also important to me that I take time to acknowledge that I am on the land of the Wurundjeri people of the Kulin nations. I would like to pay my respects to their elders past and present and would like to thank all the young and emerging Aboriginal leaders who inspired me to be here today.

I would like to begin my speech with a series of questions to the chamber. Why haven’t we stopped bullying yet? Why do we struggle so much to prevent it and to help those who have experienced it? Everyone in this chamber, I am sure, knows that bullying is a massive problem in our schools. We know that it is one of the leading causes of suicide amongst young people today, and we also know that suicide is among the leading causes of death for young people in our country, period. We know this because we have seen study after study after study after study about bullying and the horrendous effects it has on the mental health of young people. And it is not getting better; it seems to be getting worse. So we have to ask ourselves: why? And what do we have to do to improve?

The first step to preventing bullying is for everyone to know what it is. That is why education and access are such vital components of our bill. It should not take numerous phone calls or hours of a parent’s time to find out what they need to do if their child has come to them about an instance of bullying that they are experiencing. No student should be left wondering: is this serious enough? Does what I am experiencing even count as bullying? These questions are important to answer not just for those who suffer at the words and hands of bullies but because at the crux at every instance of bullying a choice is being made. There is no law or legislation or societal moral code that can fully prevent someone from making the choice to put such negativity and hurt into the world, but with education no-one will be left thinking that an act of bullying is okay to do simply because they never knew it counted as bullying in the first place. Education is the first step towards arming our young people with the information that they need so that they can make better, more informed choices – because bullying impacts the mental health of everyone involved, the victims, the bystanders and the perpetrators. It is why having open access to this information is so important and has such a big role to play in improving the mental and physical health outcomes for young people who are engaging in and experiencing bullying. From day one, students should know where to go, who to talk to and what supports they can access. Teachers should feel confident in knowing how to help, where to direct their students and what policies their school has in place.

Accessibility should not be a barrier to students, parents or teachers finding the support and information they need to deal with an instance of bullying. One in six Australians – about 18 per cent of Victorians – are living with some form of disability. At some point all schools will have a disabled student, teacher, parent or guardian, and they need to be able to access this information with as few barriers as possible. That is why it is integral that we address accessibility and the availability of information in this bill. We want to make it as easy as possible to support staff and students and get everyone the help that they need. That is what this bill will help us achieve.

Many instances of bullying occur in schools, but we know that they do not just stay in schools. It is vitally important that schools acknowledge this when students come to them asking for help. A singular instance that a teacher witnesses, of a classmate being mocked, might not usually be grounds for significant action, but when evidence is brought forward that this behaviour continues frequently outside of school and off school grounds it needs a space to be considered, because we cannot be teaching young people that bullying is okay as long as it does not happen on school grounds.

I wonder how many in this chamber have ever thought, ‘I wish I knew how to help you’, about a friend, a young person who has come to them, anyone that they know who has been bullied. If this bill passes, everyone will be one step closer to knowing how to help.

**Maddison ROBERTS-CASTANO:** I would like to mirror the content warning of my fellow honourable member.

I would like to begin by highlighting that this bill has been reasonably thought out to address a serious issue faced by many and that the opposition commends its creation. However, the opposition has certain issues with the bill in its current state that we feel need to be addressed. Should these be left unchecked, these issues will hinder the effectiveness of this bill and damage the ability for the bill to achieve its purposes.

One key concern with this bill the opposition has identified is the process of anonymous reporting this bill aims to implement. While the creation of this process will likely incite more individuals facing bullying to report it, the bill lacks consideration towards the active duty of care teachers hold in a school setting. This process will likely work in conflict to said duty of care due to the inability for accurate follow-ups to be taken up with individuals, hindering the achievability of the purpose outlined in clauses 1(d) and (e).

Furthermore, the bill seems to overlook how valuable the establishment of a bullying prevention and response board will actually be, from its hindrance of effectiveness as a result of the time allocated to meetings to its indistinguishable standard of criteria for the evaluation of the progress a school has made in implementing bullying prevention policies. While it is necessary for an evaluating body to exist, the one suggestion suggested within this bill will not be beneficial.

Another issue worth highlighting is the matter of which schools will be required to implement the strategy. Obviously to meet the purposes outlined within this bill, it will have to apply to all Victorian schools. However, the opposition would like the government to clarify just how they expect to have one standard for the bullying intervention and prevention policies that will apply to all types of schools – government schools, non-government schools, language schools, specialist schools, selective entry schools, virtual schools – as well as different levels of schools – kindergarten, primary, secondary, tertiary. These are all schools. They all face some form of bullying. Yet the opposition finds it incredibly difficult to foresee the policies to be implemented in all of them, as it is, to resolve the issue.

As if these flaws were not enough, this bill overall is severely vague on several matters. There are no clear restrictions on protecting the anonymous reporting from false-claiming individuals. There are inconsistencies and contradictions throughout, and oddly, there seem to be no consequences for uncooperative schools. If the government is strongly for reducing bullying incidents, why are there no penalties for non-compliance or failure to meet the standard? Yes, reviewing and identifying non-compliance is one thing. However, how is this bill going to ensure that schools follow the rules? Shockingly, it does not do anything. Overall the issue that this bill addresses is such an important one and one that desperately needs a practical solution. This bill is a great step towards that solution. However, we cannot allow these flaws to be unchecked and questions to be unanswered.

**Jack DUMBLE:** I would once again like to reiterate the trigger warning – if anyone would like to step out – that my speech will cover mental illness, graphic imagery on the treatment of children and suicide.

We are failing our youth, and it is not just the government, it is not just the school system, it is not just our teachers – it is all of us. We sit, we watch, we pat each other on the back, spit on their wounds and send them back out there – ‘Yeah, you get them, champ! Grit your teeth and hike up your pants, and in doing that experience, hospitalise and murder our youth.’ Are we that uncaring? Are the people staring at me, as we propose that we end bullying in this extremely efficient way, the people that do not want to stop the tragedies happening in every school? And no, this does not end in schools. This carries on beyond schools to instil a sense of fear and shame within our young people for a lifetime. Schools sit and watch as students suffer time and time again. Some students see their teachers more than their own parents. These teachers and principals are essentially raising these children, and they have no idea how to handle these issues. Yet the opposition fails to eliminate – and disregards the necessity of this bill.

Please note that this bill is not just for the students but also for the teachers. The pain of watching someone, who you are essentially raising, suffer and having no skills and no opportunity to end it, is a painful experience for anyone to experience. That is why I would like to bookend this speech with the same quote: we are failing our youth, and it is not just the government, it is not just the school system, it is not just our teachers – it is every single one of us.

**Ineka LEFFLER:** This bill explores bullying intervention processes across Victorian schools with a dangerous oversight regarding their proposed anonymous reporting. I would like to draw attention to clause 5.3:

A reporting process shall be provided to the public to submit any witness to negative behaviour of students outside of school;

(a) This shall remain anonymous.

It seems to me that this government has failed to understand the reality of school students, school systems and society. What is stopping people, which includes any individual – whether they be student, criminal or competitive parent – from lodging false claims, negating critical time and resources from real and harmful instances of bullying? Furthermore, if students are submitting these proposed anonymous reports of bullying instances, what happens to a school’s duty of care? Teachers owe a duty of care to respond to and follow up on instances of bullying. Is the government seriously proposing a complete change in the duty of care owed by teachers in schools to students?

Moreover, clause 8.2(b) states that reports will:

Be followed up in a timely manner.

How does the government propose to do this if evidence is anonymous? Are they tracking down random community members, going against their will? Are they breaking the goal of anonymous reporting to actually do something – to follow up and fact-check?

Finally, this bill’s lack of definition around evidence is honestly concerning. Can some randoms take a photo or video statement or even follow a request and classify it as bullying? Where are the guidelines? To fit this government’s definition of bullying being repetitive, are randoms meant to submit multiple pieces of evidence or stalk these kids for it to be effective?

**Flora GILLIES:** I would like to address clause 7. Clause 7 addresses anti-bullying procedures and processes in schools, and it is instrumental in the bill – bullying intervention and prevention in schools. The clause suggests that schools should have a bullying prevention and response plan that is separate from their student engagement policy, highlighting the importance of addressing and preventing bullying in schools. Bullying is a pervasive issue in our society, and it can have a detrimental effect on the physical and mental wellbeing of individuals. Schools are particularly vulnerable to bullying, as children and young adults spend a significant amount of time in these environments. This is why having a separate bullying prevention and response plan is crucial to maintaining a safe and inclusive learning environment for all students. A bullying prevention and response plan that is differentiated from a student engagement plan is an important part of our bill, as it means bullying cannot go unnoticed due to a lack of policy.

Additionally the clause provides guidelines for addressing bullying behaviours, including the use of appropriate intervention strategies and consequences, and defines what bullying is. This approach ensures that all incidences of bullying are addressed appropriately and equitably. Moreover, the clause requires schools to communicate their bullying response plan clearly and review it every two years, ensuring the policies and practices that have been established remain up-to-date and effective.

Clause 7 is an essential step in ensuring that our schools provide a safe and inclusive environment for all students. It provides a comprehensive approach to addressing and preventing bullying and providing support to those managing it and those affected by it. As a society we must prioritise youth safety and wellbeing, and clause 7 in our bill shows a crucial step towards this goal.

**Syazwani SAIFUDIN:** The opposition's bill calls for the establishment of a bullying prevention and response board – or rather, a flimsy excuse for a board. This board has several fundamental flaws that speak to the inadequacies of the bill as a whole. The board shall review and audit school processes related to bullying, but there are a total of 1557 government schools in Victoria and a total of 2286 schools overall. What schools will be audited and on what basis? This board runs the risk of targeting schools of certain demographics or in certain areas unfairly.

Additionally, board meetings shall be no longer than 3 hours. This arbitrary number clearly serves no purpose other than to make up for the bill's lack of substance. Having this subclause in legislation significantly restricts the effectiveness of the board and is a logistical nightmare. Essentially if a meeting ran for 3½ hours, it would become illegal, and a board member could sue.

The board will also develop compulsory online learning modules, but such modules are already in abundance, one example being the Victorian government's Bully Stoppers online toolkit. Lastly, the biggest problem: the board must include, and I quote: 'One member from a marginalised group'. While well-intentioned, this is a lazy, distasteful way to promote diversity. It is tokenistic to mandate the presence of a member from a marginalised group and oversimplifies the very concept of diversity itself. Marginalised groups encompass a plethora of identities, and each group has a unique perspective that cannot be represented by a single member. The board also mandates a member from the Centre for Multicultural Youth. As a racial minority, this member would likely be considered marginalised, providing a loophole and proving the ludicrousness of such a clause. Overall, the enforcing body of such reforms, being so poorly thought out, is an obvious reflection of the bill as a whole.

**Helix HAMILTON:** This bill is vital to rebuild trust and reputability in our educational institutions. How can we call ourselves the Education State when students fear going to school and do not feel supported? This bill outlines the role of a bullying support and prevention officer. This role is necessary to improve the support available to students and assist in the prevention of bullying through education. The need for a bullying support and prevention officer seems obvious to me. I would be surprised if anyone in this chamber has not experienced some kind of bullying before or known someone close to them who has, and this role in schools is designed to improve accessibility to knowledge and to schools' bullying policies. Opposition, consider: if you do not know what will happen after you report bullying, will you? If you do not know who to report to, will you report? If I asked any student in the room, 'What is your school's exact bullying process?', would you even know where to find it?

Ultimately bullying is more likely to be under-reported, because young people do not know where to go for this vital information. This is why we want this role to exist. It has a dedicated time allowance to support schools and students by increasing accessibility to bullying reporting processes as well as providing support to students impacted by bullying. This role will be a game changer in schools. We already expect teachers to go above and beyond for our schools, and they do not really have enough time or mental energy in their day as it is. Hence why the bullying support and prevention officer needs to be its own role, with specific time allowances. Having a dedicated role will also help build trust and confidentiality between the student body and their school. Privacy is paramount when dealing with bullying. If young person does not feel comfortable with the process of reporting, then the guidance of a trained and trusted adult could make all the difference. This bill is the best way forward, and early prevention in schools is key. The support of this role can provide young people – (*Time expired*)

**Sophie CHEN:** This bill claims to be about bullying intervention and prevention in schools, but what schools? Only once does this bill refer to what schools it is talking about. It starts it shall apply to all schools in Victoria. This would encompass government schools, non-government schools, language schools, specialist schools, selective entry schools and distance education through Virtual School Victoria. It would also cover schools of all levels, from kindergarten through to university. This bill obviously fails to consider the complexities and diverse contextual factors of different educational institutions.

Varying student populations, cultural backgrounds and pedagogical approaches mean that such a broad bill will do more harm than good. For example, in clause 7.3 this bill mentions that copies of the bullying prevention and response plan will be ‘freely available around the school’, implying that online schooling was not even considered. This is appalling considering the tough reality of online schooling just a few years ago. Additionally, educational institutions, especially universities and non-government schools, often exercise a degree of autonomy in determining their internal policies and practices. Imposing this bill on such institutions will infringe upon this, causing various issues such as student and family dissatisfaction, which will ultimately hinder learning. Clause 8 also declares that a bullying awareness program shall be included as part of the Respectful Relationships curriculum with all Victorian schools, yet 787 schools in Victoria do not even have the Respectful Relationships program implemented. The bill also states that the role of the FTE officer shall be conveyed to students through ‘regular announcements’ in school assemblies and school newsletters. But not all schools have newsletters or assemblies. What about them? This type of lack of consideration proves how the generalisations in this bill make it an inherently weak one.

**Estella JAMES:** As my fellow members have said, past instances have shown time and time again that the people who are in charge of bullying protocols are fundamentally out of touch with the people who are experiencing bullying. This often leads to situations of this nature being grossly mishandled because people do not understand how to effectively prevent bullying – they have never experienced it. Under this bill a bullying prevention and response board will be established. This board would include people who have knowledge about several youth issues: a youth member, a member from Youth Affairs Council as well as a member from the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing. These members understand bullying more than the people currently in charge, and they understand the effect it has on our youth. For example, a person from the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing might have an insight into homelessness – the effects of homelessness on our youth and how it may lead to bullying. This would allow them to better combat the bullying that these students may experience and implement better policies for dealing with these issues. These are groups which would likely be able to offer valuable insights into the reasons behind bullying and the effects it has, which are so significant, as bullying is a serious issue everywhere, including Victoria. The expertise and insight of this board is crucial to combating it.

I would also like to address the government’s previous statement, about how families who go to private schools and schools of that nature might be displeased with implementing a bullying policy that takes power away from the school administration. Is the opposition really claiming that we shouldn’t implement bullying legislation because families might be displeased? I am afraid I fail to understand this point. Bullying is an issue that many children experience, and many families experience it too. It is an important issue which we must deal with.

**Zariah WEBB:** This bill is unnecessary. I would like to address clause 5, ‘Evidence of Bullying’, specifically clauses 5.2 and 5.3. Clause 5.2 states that:

A student wearing uniform outside of school hours shall face consequences within school hours for their actions.

What will the punishment be for these individuals committing such a heinous act? Why has this punishment not been outlined within this clause of the bill? Will schools decide their own plan to detain and prevent more bullying? We would not know because it is not in the bill. Clause 5.3 states:

A reporting process shall be provided to the public to submit any witness to negative behaviour of students outside of school;

Government, why are you relying on the general public to submit any evidence, per se, of bullying? How are we making the general public liable to take time out of their day to submit an incident report? No matter how hard we try, bullying unfortunately will never stop.

Clause 8 entails that staff, students, parents, guardians and community members will have access to the incident report forms introduced in clause 5. However, this is problematic. How would members of the community be aware of the identity of those seen committing acts of bullying outside of school in uniform? I suppose they

could use photos, but why promote such an unethical way of an incident report? Taking photos of minors without consent is not illegal but is highly unethical.

Clause 8.2(a)(vii) states that images can be submitted on these incident forms. Although I understand that bullying is such a disgusting act, so is encouraging strangers to take photos of minors without consent. So I ask the government: why promote something so unethical? All these incident forms are creating more work. Imagine the extra strain on an already strained education system. How would schools cope with the extra workload? Bullying is meant to be dealt with by employees at schools under their duty of care, so why instil such an extra, unnecessary workload? The onus should not be on the general public, who may not have the students' best interests in mind.

**Kaidance GREEN:** I would like to mention that there will be talk of self-inflicted death, and if anybody would like to leave the house at any time, please feel welcome to.

If this bill gets passed, it will help so many young people be able to find support that, when I was younger, I did not have the opportunity to find and that so many other young people have not been taught how to find. Dolly's Dream was created after the loss of a 14-year-old girl who took her life because of bullying. It is devastating that a foundation like Dolly's Dream had to come after such a tragedy because youth are not educated enough on how to reach out for support and who to reach out to in difficult times.

Voting on behalf of this bill will ensure that youth will be able to gain the support that they need by the people that impact most of their lives, which is teachers. Teachers have one of the biggest impacts on our youths' lives today and having a bill about helping educate youth on bullying, where to get support and who to talk to is important. A study done by Bullying. No Way! shows that approximately one in four Australian students in years 4 to 9 reported being bullied every few weeks or more often. Teaching mental health awareness and educating youth on how to gain support will help build a more resilient population. It will help decrease the amount of people who are getting bullied.

**Natasha CORLUKA:** I would like to draw the house's attention to clause 9, which establishes the mandate of a full-time bullying support and prevention officer in every school. While this is a well-meaning clause, it is an inefficient and ineffective approach. The role of this officer would be to run activities which promote building good mental health and develop resilience techniques within cohorts of student. Let us circle back to clause 6, which establishes a bullying awareness program. If this program is successful, then tell me, what is the point of having a full-time bullying officer? Is it not overkill to have the bullying awareness program take up every single semester at every year level on top of having the FTE run their own activities? Additionally, if all staff are adequately trained to deal with bullying, this would ensure if clause 10 was effective, then an FTE would not be needed to exclusively support students experiencing bullying.

Many schools also already have support systems and personnel like wellbeing officers in place to address bullying and promote mental health. Teachers, counsellors and administrators can collectively work together to address bullying incidents and provide support to affected students. It is essential to leverage the existing roles and expertise within the school community, rather than creating separate resource-wasting positions?

**Alice TILSON:** To the complaint that the bill encompassing all schools is somehow a bad thing, let me remind everyone that bullying is never okay, no matter the circumstances. Whether you are bullied in German or English, it is still going to hurt – so it is a good thing that this affects language skills. Similarly, whether you are bullied online, through a virtual school or in person, it still hurts. It is the same whether you are at a private school or a public school – bullying still causes pain. It is a brilliant thing that this bill covers all schools.

**Maxwell McKELLAR:** I would just like to say that I do support the idea of this bill and I do think we need some legislation around bullying prevention. I do not think this bill is the solution. I would just like to run through some issues that came to my attention while reading this bill. I will start at clause 4.2(b)(iii), which was mentioned earlier by another member in the chamber:

Meetings shall be no longer than 3 hours ...

A bit weird you mentioned that. I do not see what the point of that is. Moving on from that, clause 4.4:

Board positions shall be paid a sitting fee of 30 units ...

The government fails to define what the units are, so that could be anything. The only mention of units here is FTE, full-time equivalent units. Are you going to pay board positions for 30 of them? I do not think so. Moving on from that, clause 5.6:

For matters including ongoing cyberbullying, the police or school shall take upon the investigative stage.

Make up your mind – one or the other. It is not that hard. Moving on to clause 6.3(a):

The different types of bullying, including ...

What about other types of bullying you have not listed? Maybe think about that next time. Moving on, clause 6.3(b):

The long-term negative effects that bullying has on mental health, including ...

You have not shown any facts to that. I would like to see them, government. And in clause 6.3(b), I am having trouble concentrating. This is not necessarily a mental health issue. It is something that most students in the education system struggle with. You talk about building positive school culture. I do not see how that is relevant to preventing bullying. In clause 8.2(a)(iii):

Forms shall be written in plain language

Once again, the government has failed to define something. Also, in – (*Time expired*)

**Jamie CAMPBELL:** The opposition raised some points concerning the reasons by which the government is relying on the general public to safeguard children. Safeguarding children is everyone's responsibility. There is no legal requirement for citizens to report bullying that exists within this bill; it is simply a pathway by which the community can come together to protect kids from violence in schools.

There were also concerns raised about forcing a policy on private schools and other institutions that traditionally have some more autonomy from the government. Building on the case that the honourable member James built, every student in Victoria deserves the right to be both adequately and equitably protected from bullying – no matter what schools they go to, no matter what their parents might think of it, no matter what.

There were also concerns raised about the issue of students potentially making false reports. This is a valid argument, but the government wishes to propose that the many should not be punished for the actions of the few. A key barrier for young people to speak out against bullying is starting up those conversations with the responsible authorities because they are afraid. We cannot undervalue this pathway for young people to report the harm being committed against them by other students because other people may abuse it. We need to empower bullying victims, and this is how we are going to do it.

**Molly MEADOWS:** This is a short but sweet statement. Teachers do not need to be given extra strain. They are already under enough stress. Leave it the way it was. This bill is redundant.

**Krushnadevsinh RAVALJI:** As Youth Premier I just want to make a quick announcement. Feel free to breathe in and have some water. If you do need to leave, even from the gallery, feel free to do so as well. It is a happy topic.

Before I begin, to the opposition's points that it is not going to be diverse, it is not going to be representative enough, clause 4.3 clearly states:

The Board shall be comprised of diverse members ...

And they are clearly pointed out. Paragraph (d) says:

One member from the Centre for Multicultural Youth ...

As a board member at Centre for Multicultural Youth, I will just say that our young people that do some of the programs there are extremely talented and they will not be loopholed into paragraph (e), which is:

One member from a marginalised group;

I believe my government has decided to put paragraph (e) because we recognise that marginalised groups – historically there are some – continue to shift as society develops. We wanted to add that point in because we as a government do not speak for every single minority.



To clause 5.3, on a reporting process, I would like to point out a supportive process which currently is in place in Victoria and is doing a very good job. The Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission has already an anonymous reporting portal online where you can report discrimination, which is doing wonders. On discrimination, the biggest reason it exists in our community is because people are afraid to speak up, people are afraid to have a say, and this portal allows for that. The strategies in this bill will allow for that. The second biggest reason is because it is not acted upon, and that is where this bill comes in. I believe, this government and everyone in this chamber, that if we do pass this bill, young people will have the right to speak up, be heard and for actions to be taken.

**Dimithri WICKRAMARATNE:** On behalf of my side of the chamber, as Youth Leader of the Opposition I just want to acknowledge the traditional owners of this land, past, present and emerging, where we have been conducting our debates for the last few days.

As for the bill itself, I will admit it is a tough one. I acknowledge the government's efforts in trying to propose something that will try and save lives and will try and make things better in our public and private schools, but be mindful that what the opposition is presenting to you guys are ways to improve your bill – ways to make it better, to make it last longer, without us having to come and visit it in the short term just to fix something because it failed to address the concerns to begin with. The point for bringing that up is I will dare to try to improve the bill, so until you present a bill that is able to address these legitimate concerns, I would recommend holding off on passing it today.

**Angelo von MÖLLER:** The reality is that those opposite are floundering like a hungry fish that has not eaten for days, looking for food in the cracks and crannies. The opposition can critique the definitions as much as they like, but from over here it feels like being attacked by a cotton scarf – you do not really feel it when it hits. The reality is that this bill is an incredible opportunity to prevent bullying and is an excellent step in the right direction.

**Jasmine TWIGG:** First up, a few flaws. I love the idea; it is great. I think everyone in here agrees it is a great idea, we all want it to be true, but we cannot allow a flawed program to enter our state. How can a student report to teachers or adults if they are unsafe to them?

Do you expect a child and content warning? I forgot to do this at the start, so if you want to leave the chamber, I recommend you do now.

But what happens if a child cannot tell their parents because of an abusive relationship they may be enduring? And maybe the bullying has come from their home life. There have been some cases of bullying where the perpetrator is only a perpetrator because that is how they are treated at home and so they consider that the norm. And how do you expect students to report? Some students may not wish to report – I was once one – because of the peer pressure. They may feel like they would be a coward if they were to report bullying. How do you fix that problem?

It says in clause 4.2(a) that the board you create will do a review every three years. Is three years not too long? If your bill is covering cyberbullying, with technology's rapidly advancing rate three years may be too long for every review. You said the three years is a change in law. The last I knew – correct me if I am wrong – you can only change law if you create a new bill. So if you want to release this, change this bill and make it flawless for it to pass.

At clause 4.3 – board members – you forgot to mention 'disabled'. In all our previous debates you have been picking on people – (*Time expired*)

**Matilda SECKOLD:** Honourable member Meadows said that the current system of teachers dealing with bullying works well enough and that teachers are already under enough stress as it is. Some might try to say that introducing the youth mental health first aid and the bullying support and prevention officer role increases the stress placed upon teachers and schools and uses up resources. But I do not believe this to be the case. A school's full-time English teacher will not be expected to fulfil the role of the bullying support and prevention officer on top of their existing workload, but their youth mental health first aid training will make sure that they are competent and equipped with the skills they need to support their students. As it is, teachers already have to deal with bullying within schools. This will only standardise the process, making it more effective and better.

The opposition has also brought up how we cannot rely on members of the public, students, teachers and the victims to report on bullying. Well, if they are not reporting this, who is – the bully? I do not think so. The opposition is just nitpicking at a well-written bill.

**Lennon JABLONKA:** I would just like to bring up some concerns that my chamber has had over the bill, because I have been handed, like, 40 notes. First of all, in clause 10.1, as honourable member Seckold mentioned, all of the teachers will not have to fulfil the role of the bullying prevention support officer, and yet they have to receive the same training. Why? If they are a full-time worker, they should always be available. Additionally, the government fails to define several terms, including ‘minority group’ and ‘trauma informed’, leaving them up to interpretation. In clause 9.4 it states that the bullying support and prevention officer is able to work in the role for three weeks before completing compulsory learning modules, making their presence there pretty much useless for three weeks. Also, ‘simple universal design’ in clause 8.2(a)(vi) – what does that mean? The anti-bullying procedure and process is meant to be unique for each school, and yet a universal design would imply it has to be the same for every school – once again, ill-defined. Finally, as mentioned by the government, every school has their own needs – and yet they are determined to push this same policy onto every school.

**Quinn Le FEVRE:** I ask the opposition: are you really okay with students continuing to get bullied, even though you have suggested that students may use this anonymous reporting system negatively? Bullying kills thousands of students every year. We are losing young lives because of lack of policy, because of lack of regulation, because students are not able to report incidents, because students cannot stop bullying themselves. This is why there is such a need for this bill. The broadness of this bill comes from a need, a need that it needs to reach all schools and all students. If the bill was too specific, it would not get to areas that need it the most. Furthermore, addressing the private school remark from the opposition, all schools must implement this bill, and private schools are not barred from this – for all students who lose their lives to bullying. To stop this the opposition better hurry up and pass this bill.

**Ryan PETERSON:** I would like to first applaud the government for putting forward this bill. To work towards the prevention of bullying is noble and downright required. However, I do wonder how effective parts of this bill will actually be. To follow up on the points of honourable member Le Fevre, I draw the house’s attention to clause 7.3, which states that schools shall identify groups at high risk of being victims of bullying. If I understand the scope of this bill correctly, this would be in effect for all schools – all schools in Victoria: public, private, religious, independent and so on and so forth. So when the Presbyterian Church of Victoria released a statement saying that they would not endorse LGBTIQA students being promoted to leadership positions, would this school identify their LGBTIQA student community as high risk? What about any other marginalised group that is not recognised on the basis of religion or indeed on any other reason that the needs of a student cohort would be disregarded. This is a depressing oversight in an otherwise very ambitious bill. When a school, not a student but a school or a teacher or otherwise, disregards or otherwise bullies another student, what exactly will happen? How can the success of this bill be ensured when a school can see fit to disregard the processes outlined in this bill?

**Asha SURUJPAL:** I would like to address the remark about diverse not meaning disabled. Diversity is not limited to cultural diversity, but the word encompasses all different types of diversity, including different genders, ages, abilities, cultures and socio-economic background among many other things. Whilst we have included a prerequisite for cultural backgrounds, these other people will not be barred from the board.

**Lilly CORRELL:** Whilst I must also commend the government for their attempt at this bill, the model is of extreme concern to the opposition. This will not work for every school. This bill highlights a model that would work for a large mainstream school, yet there are clear oversights. A dedicated bullying support and prevention officer will not work for everyone. This model does not work. The attempt at this bill will hinder schools. The monitoring of students is also of deep concern. As mentioned previously, are we allowing people to try and take photos and encourage them to spy on students outside of school? Written in the bill, it highlights these red flags. We are not simply putting them on the table, we are waving them high in the air. This bill is a form of bullying. I would encourage the government to re-read the bill and reconsider what they have put forward. The sentiment is one that the opposition strongly encourages but the forcefulness and the long procedures put in place will hinder instead of help schools and in turn further marginalise and criminalise students.

**Raidah PARVEZ:** Firstly, the units mentioned in clause 4 are a standard unit to address the Australian currency system. Secondly, the opposition question the benefits of a positive school culture. A positive school culture is essential to address bullying. The opposition has been talking about taking proactive action rather than reactive action and this bill is it. By building a positive school culture, we are creating an environment in which bullying is not the first response. In this bill we want to take both proactive and reactive action as at no point should a student be bullied and as a result feel unsafe or scared in their school environment, one in which they spend so much time. This bill wants to cover all time lines of bullying. Whether it is active or reactive, any action is important. We are trying to control what we can where we can. A school environment is an open environment that can easily be moderated, as this bill suggests. It is time to control bullying, it is time to fulfil Dolly's dream.

**Kyla-Michelle ANDERSON:** This government is so blinded by their own bill that they cannot recognise our real concerns.

**The ACTING SPEAKER:** May I just remind the members from the government that this is the last opportunity for open debate today. If anyone who has not spoken would like to, stand up – you do not have to.

**Hugo Nawat SOMBOONSIN:** I would just like to say to the opposition that this bill is about bullying. At its core it is about addressing problems with bullying. Points that have been raised by the opposition have been so minor, so miniscule, so nitpicking, to use a common word. It beggars belief that they would oppose an entire bill around innovative measures to address bullying based solely on one word, this and that and 'Oh, you know, it's not the right type of currency unit' or some other thing. They are being unreasonable. They are opposing a bill which will make life better for many, many people who have suffered from bullying over the years. People I know would benefit, and I am sure that members opposite would know people who would benefit from this bill, yet they are opposing it. This is unacceptable, and I hope the opposition are ashamed of themselves.

**Verity ORME:** Whilst you say that you do not exclude disabled people, you do not make any effort to include them. I think this is especially concerning considering that disabled people are amongst the most bullied. Autistic people, for example, are three times more likely to kill themselves, yet you do not consider this at all. You do not make any effort to actually include them. We need support, as disabled people, to be involved in these things. It cannot just be something that you have to engage in with your own will. We need support, and you do not include that, which makes me wonder who you are actually addressing this bill to.

**The ACTING SPEAKER:** I call on the sponsor of the bill for their right of reply.

**Zaralee McAULIFFE-DOUTHAT:** The opposition claims that this bill will not work. Should the government take this as an indication to give up and stop trying to prevent bullying entirely? Might I remind you that millions of children are bullied every year. This is not something that you can put an age on. You cannot put an age on the hurt and the trauma that this causes. Multiple studies have found that younger students, around grade 4, aged 10, are more likely to be bullied than older students of around 14, in year 8 in high school. This tells us that more education and support is actually needed at a younger year level, because we never know when someone will experience bullying for the first time.

We know that primary school aged youth are some of our most vulnerable, and as such it is vital that we are teaching them who they can go to, who their trusted adults are and how they can get help. We cannot put an age restriction on that. The point of this bill is to increase the amount of trained and trusted adults available for students to report to in all schools. If this fails, if they cannot find an adult that they trust, there is an anonymous reporting system available to them should they need to use it. All students have a fundamental right to feel safe in their schools among their peers and with their teachers, and that is what this bill will achieve.

**The ACTING SPEAKER:** The question is:

That the Bullying Intervention and Prevention in Schools Bill 2023 be now read a second and a third time.

**Question agreed to.**

**Read second time.**

**Read third time.**

*Members applauded.*

**Dimithri WICKRAMARATNE:** On behalf of the real government in waiting, I would like to thank you, Acting Speaker, for your service today. I would like to thank the clerks for the wonderful role in our debates; our Taskforce members for always looking after us; the youth parliamentarians for your wonderful speeches; the Youth Premier himself – I have to give it to him; and to the lovely audience in the gallery for watching our debate and for staying with us this long. Thank you so much, guys.

**Krushnadevsinh RAVALJI:** I would like to add to the opposition leader's points. I also would like to acknowledge Marcia, the founder of Youth Parliament, who has joined us for this debate. We would not be here without you, so thank you so much. So a bit of context: this is the 37th Youth Parliament and Marcia had the founding ideas for Youth Parliament back in the first parliament.

Also, to youth parliamentarians: this was a tough debate. We are going into adjournment speeches, so please take care of yourselves. Take a break if you need to, have some water. It is totally fine to listen to music and chillax. Thank you so much. That was a very mature debate.

**Sitting suspended 2:40 pm until 3:02 pm.**

### *Adjournment*

**Krushnadevsinh RAVALJI:** I move:

That the house do now adjourn.

**The ACTING SPEAKER (Kaitlin Woolford):** As I mentioned last night in our chamber meetings, I will be doing a general content warning for our adjournments today, and then on our list of speakers we have got a little asterisk next to people who require a very specific content warning. If I forget it, please just pop your hand up. I did accidentally forget it in the upper house, so I have hopefully got everyone's down. So, a general content warning: some issues that we discuss today may be challenging or present challenging topics for some people. If you wish to leave the chamber, there will be time for you to do so before the member starts speaking. If any members of the house wish to remove their blazers, this is also the time to do so, as it is very warm.

All right. First off the cuff, I wish to call on honourable member Anderson, who will be talking about youth justice – and if anyone wishes to leave the chamber, you may do so now.

### **Youth crime prevention**

**Kyla-Michelle ANDERSON:** My speech is addressed to the Minister for Youth Justice Enver Erdogan. I rise today to speak about an issue that is of great concern, youth justice in Victoria. As we all know, crime rates have been on the rise in our state, particularly in relation to knife crime. This is an issue that affects not only the safety of our communities but the future of our young people. One of the main contributing factors to this issue is the lack of education and resources available to young people in Victoria. Many of our youth are not aware of the consequences of their actions or the risks associated with getting involved in dangerous activities. They may feel like they have no other options or that they are not valued members of our society, and this is a problem that we cannot ignore. We need to work together to provide better opportunities for our youth so that we can make informed decisions and avoid getting caught up in dangerous situations.

This means investing in education and support services, as well as creating safe spaces for young people to gather and connect with each other. Recent statistics show that there is a clear correlation between education and crime rates. Young people who have access to quality education are less likely to engage in criminal activities and are more likely to have a successful future. By investing in our youth, we are investing in the future of our state. In conclusion, I urge the minister to take action on this issue. We need to work together to create a better future for our young people and for our community as a whole.

### **Indigenous studies**

**The ACTING SPEAKER:** Honourable member McAuliffe-Douthat will be discussing valuing Indigenous knowledge in higher education. If any member of the chamber wishes to leave, you may do so now.

**Zaralee McAULIFFE-DOUTHAT:** I would like to address this adjournment speech to the Minister for Higher Education and the Minister for Treaty and First Peoples. As a Guna Kurnai woman, I went to university to expand my knowledge of other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander groups within Australia, and I found that there was a lack of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teachers brought in to teach these subjects. What I often heard was that these teachers are in high demand. There are not enough of them. They are hard to source, especially with the qualifications that these universities were requiring. To me, all I heard when they were saying that is that it seemed to showcase that they are not actually valuing Indigenous knowledge and Indigenous knowledge holders. Their focus is on the degrees that these people supposedly should have from other universities instead of actually valuing the Indigenous knowledge that they have and that they are the most equipped to speak on. Instead, a lot of our references were books written by colonialist writers, sometimes full of historical inaccuracies and there was just this atmosphere—the university seem very frustrated that they could not find these people but I think they were just not looking in the correct spaces and were not willing to actually listen in the way that we need.

### Family violence

**The ACTING SPEAKER:** The honourable member Braddock will be discussing romanticising male criminals. If any member of the chamber wishes to leave, you may do so now.

**Ruby-Rose BRADDOCK:** I address this speech to the Minister for Victim Support, the Minister for Child Protection and Family Services and the Minister for Women. I want to address a disturbing issue that has been prevalent in our society for far too long: the media's tendency to romanticise male domestic abuse criminals. It is a matter that demands our attention. Headlines which emphasise their achievements, charisma or tragic backstories create a distorted image of these individuals, diverting attention from their abusive behaviour. By highlighting their positive attributes, the media indirectly perpetrates the notion that these individuals are somehow deserving of sympathy or understanding which undermines the gravity of their crimes. This not only affects public perception but also has real-life consequences. It minimises the trauma experienced by victims. It perpetrates harmful gender stereotypes by suggesting that abusive behaviour can be excused or even justified based on a person's background or personal struggles. This in turn perpetrates a cycle of violence and contributes to the prevalence of domestic abuse in our society. The media's romanticisation of male domestic abuse criminals is deeply concerning issue that demands our attention and action. It distorts the reality of these crimes, perpetrates harmful stereotypes and undermines the experiences of victims. Together we can create a world where victims are heard, abusers are held accountable and domestic abuse is unequivocally condemned.

### Chronic illness support

**The ACTING SPEAKER:** The honourable member Burns will be discussing increasing support for family members and friends of patients with chronic illness. If anyone wishes to leave the chamber, you may do so now.

**Caitlin BURNS:** I address this speech to the Victorian Minister for Health, the honourable member Mary-Anne Thomas. Over 342,000 Victorians alive today have been diagnosed with cancer in the past 40 years. More specifically, 36,974 Victorians are diagnosed with cancer each year. Last year a friend of mine was one of them. Whilst I recognise that there are a few support networks out there, I am appalled at how hidden these networks are from patients and the people in their lives. In the short time I have I urge the honourable member Mary-Anne Thomas to not only consider the support available to those who have a chronic illness but consider the support available to those who are family members or friends of patients with chronic illnesses. Not only is it important that this issue is recognised but it is important that the people who share their life with someone with a chronic illness are aware of the opportunity they have to access relevant and necessary care. Knowing that there are organisations and people willing to offer their support is crucial to protecting the mental health of each and every person affected by a chronic illness.

I would like everyone in this room to consider how many people they have met, befriended or are related to in their life. Now I would like everyone in this room to consider that almost half of the Australian population have at least one chronic illness today. Whilst this statistic is Australia wide, I encourage the Minister for Health to assess the potential for the further establishment of avenues and advertising available to patients, their families and their friends, because without a doubt this affects Victorians on a large scale. It is time we recognised that

the mental and emotional effects of a chronic illness do not stop at the patients but impact all of those around them and in their lives.

### Limiting gambling advertising

**The ACTING SPEAKER:** The honourable member Campbell will be discussing limiting gambling advertising. Again, if anyone wishes to leave the chamber, you may do so now.

**Jamie CAMPBELL:** I would like to address this adjournment speech to the Minister for Casino, Gaming and Liquor Regulation, the honourable member Melissa Horne. Gambling is an industry, and in our society that means that the businesses within it exist to make a profit. Unfortunately that means that we end up with corporations that advertise predatorily and capitalise upon the vulnerable. Current Victorian gambling laws are laid out across many bills and restrictions, but I will be referring mostly to the *Gambling Regulation Act 2003* and the Gambling Regulations 2015. The former is the primary piece of gambling legislation in current Victorian law and aims to foster responsible gambling by restricting advertising and the conduct of gambling companies. The latter has a lot to do with slot machines and a lot of super-technical stuff, like where windows and lights have to be placed.

Steps have been taken in the right direction in Victoria, with new rules regarding mandatory breaks for those using slot machines for over 3 hours straight and limiting the amount of time a person can spend playing pokies every week to 36 hours. This is really good, but it also is not enough. Little ‘Please gamble responsibly’ messages at the ends of ads do not detract from the enticing, addicting promise contained within the advertisements of winning more and having more money. We cannot end addiction by asking nicely. Windows do not prevent the human brain from falling victim to the sunk-cost fallacy. Break or no, lives are being ruined and loved ones are being lost. Pain and suffering is being inflicted upon our communities even with the gambling restrictions.

Furthermore, online gambling sites use cryptocurrencies to further muddy the waters as to how much money the punter is losing, and mobile games use microtransactions to prey on young kids to get them to play slot machine-style games without even realising they are spending real-world money. We need to topple this elaborate house of cards.

I am going to have to skip a bit in the centre. Punters need to know how much money they are likely to make back on the dollar to be given truly informed consent when they give away their money, and this declaration needs to be clear everywhere.

### Women in leadership

**The ACTING SPEAKER:** The honourable member Correll will be discussing women in leadership, and if any member of the chamber wishes to leave, you may do so now.

**Lilly CORRELL:** I would like to address my speech to the honourable member Natalie Hutchins, Minister for Women. ‘Not now, not ever’ were words famously echoed by Julia Gillard in a fight to be accepted as the first female PM. But now more than ever women still have to work twice as hard to make it, compared to men. Eleven per cent of the ASX 200 bosses are female – 11 per cent – yet compared to their male counterparts they average higher return rates on investments compared to men – 74 per cent compared to 69. So then why do women have to fight and work harder to do just as well, or in some cases, even better? After the most recent election women held 39 per cent of seats in the state and federal parliaments.

I commend the government for their aim of 50 per cent of women in government by 2050, but we need to do more and we need to figure out how we will get there. Women in leadership programs give females the skills to deal with misogyny and sexism. It is a two-way street we have to battle. This is the sad reality we live in – that we must train women in how to deal with misogyny and sexism rather than just males purely know how to be respectful, but it is needed. Women, as we know, can learn the vital skills and contribute to our economy in the same way that men can. We need women in leadership programs. We need women. I am calling for more funding and more support. As women we need to know we are enough. We need to know we are key. We need to know that maybe one day we can all aspire to be the next female PM.

## Youth Parliament

**Jack DUMBLE:** This speech is directed at the Youth Parliament program as a whole. It should be noted this speech comes from a place of love for the program. The biggest draw to the Youth Parliament program is the focus on youth voices and elevating those same voices in order to find real solutions to the topics we are so passionate about. As a whole the program is a success in this area; however, we stumble in the final steps because of the lack of amendments in the program. I fail to be convinced that our valid solutions and opinions are more than just buzzing in the Parliament's ear, and I want to participate in the actual conversations on how to solve the issues I and this entire program are passionate about.

I am a passionate member of the young person's community. We are amongst the most affected people when Parliament makes a decision, as this affects the rest of our lives. I feel I am told I have a platform but it is ripped from underneath me before I finish my point. Clearly every bill proposed by the Youth Parliament participants is important, but we are stopped just short of the discussion we require. We have the privilege of being the young people closest to having our voices heard. Until now the Youth Parliament has told us to propose our problems, but I say we propose our solutions.

## School staffing

**Lennon JABLONKA:** I would like to address this to honourable members Natalie Hutchins and Ben Carroll, the ministers for education and employment, respectively. I would like you to put yourself in the shoes of a teacher: wake up at 6 am, head off to work, spend 6 or 7 hours engaging with students and other teachers, then another hour or so before heading home. It seems easy, right? Wrong. Many teachers are expected or forced to take work home with them. Here is some interesting information from the Australian Education Union. Teachers spend on average 16½ hours a week unpaid working on school work. That number jumps to nearly 32 hours during report time. And the Victorian government is saving \$92 million every semester by not paying teachers for this work. Does this seem fair or just?

As a Victorian student in a rural area I have seen time and time again bright-eyed new teachers come into work on their first day, only to become dreary and tired by the end of the year before inevitably leaving. Simply put, this is a disgrace. It is one of the most important professions, responsible for largely schooling us and shaping us into who we are today – and this is how we treat them? This is a problem that can be ignored no longer.

The fact of the matter is there are two possible solutions. The first would be to decrease the amount of work that teachers have to do every day to give them the time in the day to complete it. Or use that \$92 million that the Victorian government is saving and invest it – invest it in the wellbeing of a vital profession, invest it into the students, invest it into our future. Invest in teachers.

## Gender-affirming care

**The ACTING SPEAKER:** The honourable member Green will be discussing gender-affirming care. If any member of the chamber wishes to leave, they may do so now.

**Kaidance GREEN:** I would like to address this speech to the Minister for Mental Health and the Minister for Health. Currently accessing gender-affirming care is hard due to the fact it is not deemed necessary care. People who want to access gender-affirming care may have to pay high amounts of money just to be able to be comfortable in their own body. Currently some forms of gender affirming care are seen as cosmetic, even though gender-affirming care can be life-saving for so many people. I ask for two things: (1) why is gender-affirming care so expensive when it can save so many lives and (2) is there is a way to lower the expenses of gender-affirming care so that there are more people able to have the opportunity to be comfortable in their own body?

## Group voting tickets

**Estella JAMES:** I address my speech to the Premier Dan Andrews. In my speech I am going to discuss something that affects every single person sitting here today – and a lot of people in Victoria do not even know what it is. I am talking about group voting tickets. Group voting tickets essentially are the difference between above-the-line and below-the-line voting and are used in our Legislative Council elections. Essentially when you vote above the line, you vote for one party and you vote for that party's predetermined preference order.

This means that many people who vote above the line (a) do not know what they are voting for and (b) do not even understand what they are doing when they vote. Group voting tickets are often manipulated by parties in order to preference smaller parties higher to diminish the competition of larger parties. For example, many people may find themselves voting for smaller parties inadvertently through their choice of above-the-line voting when they are not aware of what the party's group voting ticket is.

You may say that this does not impact elections. But I ask: why is Victoria the only state that still uses group voting tickets if this is the case? Additionally, over 90 per cent Victorians vote above the line in our state elections. I would be very, very confident in saying that a majority of these people do not know what group voting tickets are and do not know what they are voting for. I believe that it is undemocratic of our state to use a voting system which less accurately reflects who people want to vote for. I believe that our state should change our election voting system to one similar to the federal election system, where people may preference multiple parties above the line.

### Refugees

**The ACTING SPEAKER:** The honourable member Kannan will be discussing refugees. If any member of the chamber wishes to leave, you may do so now.

**Yuwaluxshayan KANNAN:** I address this speech to the multicultural minister Colin Brooks and the Premier. Australia is known for its multiculturalism. A major reason behind this is refugees who decide to settle in Australia. Being refugees, they have crossed seas to get into Australia. And what are they left with? Nothing. They are stranded without any help. The importance here is not that they are abandoned, but the fact that they are abandoned without any education about Australia. This causes them to go through several hardships throughout their lives in Australia. Most of the time applications, reading and any important task are usually left to the children of these families. However, these children also do not know how to do these.

Minister, I request an education program for refugees to help them settle in and teach them – not do everything and leave them, but teach them how to do things so they can stand on their own two feet. When I first came here we had caseworkers who got us a house, jobs and enrolled us in schools. It was good – until they left. It was our turn to do the work; however, no-one knew how to do it. This is like someone doing your homework for you. At the present time it is good, but then when it is your turn, the only thing that is left is confusion. Minister, I believe an education program for the children of these families – to teach English and the system in Australia; and how to apply for services such as Medicare, which is essential – would greatly benefit our refugees. As the state for education and a country for multiculturalism, teaching our refugees is essential. They are not just refugees. They are our taxpayers, labour workers, friends, teachers and many more. But most importantly, they are one of us – Australians. Making their lives better and providing for them is not an option, but rather a necessity and our responsibility.

### Men's mental health

**Maxwell McKELLAR:** I have two adjournment speeches but I switched the order, so I will be discussing men's mental health.

I would like to address this to the Minister for Mental Health Gabrielle Williams. One in eight men suffer from depression in their lifetime. One in five suffer from anxiety. Every day in Australia approximately seven men take their own lives. In 2021 we lost 2358 men to suicide. Men's mental health has been, is and continues to be one of the most pressing issues we cannot look past. A study found that 80 per cent of men were in contact with a general practitioner while suffering from anxiety and/or depression. Forty per cent of those men reached out to a mental health practitioner. The current support services that we have in place are clearly flawed. In our modern-day society there is still so much stigma around men reaching out for support and opening up at their most vulnerable moments. So many men are having to fight wars against themselves and we let them suffer in silence.

A study found that up to 25 per cent of Australian men experience a diagnosed mental health disorder in their lifetime, 15 per cent experience a diagnosed disorder in any 12-month period and of those men only a quarter said they would reach out for help if they were suffering from personal or emotional problems. Nine per cent of 10 to 14-year-olds suffer from anxiety and depression; 7 per cent of 15 to 17-year-olds and 13 per cent of adults suffer from these issues too, with it constantly rising and becoming more prevalent throughout adulthood. My



request to the minister is that we open up this conversation, continue to talk about this and encourage men to share what they are experiencing. We need to let them know it is not a sign of weakness, it is a sign of strength. We all need help sometimes and that is okay.

### **Education funding**

**Syazwani SAIFUDIN:** I would like to address this speech to the Minister for Education, the Honourable Natalie Hutchins. The Victorian school system exacerbates class divide. The Education State is a shambles. While I am privileged to have benefited immensely from access to education, the disparity between the public and private spheres is shamefully clear. Eighty per cent of all disadvantaged students, 76 per cent of students with a disability and 84 per cent of First Nations students attend public schools. Sixty-five per cent of all Australians attend public schools, yet by 2029 public schools will be underfunded by \$6 billion and private schools overfunded by \$60 billion. This is unacceptable. Education is an inalienable right, not a product to be bought.

The Victorian government needs to completely reform and revitalise its funding system so that public schools can have access to quality education materials and infrastructure, as well as adequate staffing with fewer teachers teaching out of field. Commonwealth contributions for public schools must be lifted to 100 per cent of the schooling resource standard. The state needs to be required to share comprehensive, transparent data on the amount of government funding all schools, including private schools, receive. More of the student resource package, Victoria's education funding system, needs to be directed towards equity. There needs to be a requirement for a formal review of funding rates on a regular basis, especially of schools receiving significantly higher funding compared to schools with similar enrolment profiles. There must be more initiatives to attract teachers to work in disadvantaged schools and in regional, rural and lower socio-economic areas because all of today's students, not just the lucky few, are the stakeholders and drivers of tomorrow and deserve a level playing field to set them up for success.

### **Concussion injuries in the AFL**

**The ACTING SPEAKER:** The honourable member Seckold will be discussing concussions in AFL. If any member of the chamber wishes to leave, you may do so now.

**Matilda SECKOLD:** I would like to address my speech to the Minister for Education, the Minister for Tourism, Sport and Major Events and the Minister for Health. Concussions pose a significant threat to junior AFL players, accounting for the most common source of hospitalisations. In 2018–19 a total of 5156 injuries requiring hospitalisation were reported, with 655 of them being concussions. This accounts for approximately 12.7 per cent of all injuries, roughly one in eight incidents. This is an enormous number.

A concussion occurs when the brain rapidly moves back and forth or collides with the skull. Such sudden movements can stretch and damage brain tissue, triggering harmful changes that disrupt normal brain activity. Concentration and memory problems are common issues experienced by individuals who sustain concussions. While some junior AFL clubs have made it mandatory for players to wear headgear, studies indicate that these helmets do not effectively reduce the concussions. Therefore additional measures are needed to address this issue. I call for increased education within clubs to raise awareness about preventative strategies and player protection against concussions. Furthermore, longer post-concussion breaks should be implemented, as opposed to the current 12 days. This is just simply not enough time for the brain to fully recover. Although players might feel fine, even seemingly minor head impacts can lead to severe long-term consequences.

By prioritising education on concussions, concussion prevention and incorporating extended recovery periods, we can better protect the wellbeing of junior AFL players. It is imperative to address this serious issue and take proactive measures to ensure the long-term health and safety of those involved in the sport.

### **Food security**

**Asha SURUJPAL:** I would like to address this speech to the Premier of Victoria, the Honourable Daniel Andrews. However, before I begin, I would like to pose a content warning, as this will refer to food insecurity.

I would like to ask the Premier to please consider addressing food insecurity with greater vigour. Looking through a numerical lens, it can be seen that within the last 12 months over 540,000 households went hungry

and either had to skip a meal or go without for a day. Additionally, it was recorded that 206,000 households had to get food-relief assistance from relevant organisations. I would like to emphasise that this is entire households and not just individuals.

Premier, I could go on and on spouting facts and data about food insecurity within Victoria, and ultimately I think it is not good enough that I have to. In particular, this issue disproportionately impacts those from minority, disadvantaged or marginalised communities. I implore you to put more resources towards this issue. World hunger is a shame on humanity, and it is a shame in Victoria. Food for Victoria today, hope for Victoria tomorrow. Thank you for your time, Premier.

### **Child protection and domestic violence**

**The ACTING SPEAKER:** The honourable member Tilson will be discussing child support and domestic violence. If any member of the chamber wishes to leave, they may do so now.

**Alice TILSON:** I wish to address this speech to the Minister for Child Protection and Family Services. At age 17, one is under the control of their parents or guardians. They are deemed too young to be responsible for living otherwise. Government policy conforms with a similar line of thought, not allowing 17-year-olds to vote or drink due to their youth deeming them in need of protection by the state. However, a 17-year-old is considered an adult by one crucial government organisation – Child Protection.

Child Protection refuses to protect young people aged 17 from domestic violence, as they are deemed old enough to handle the situation themselves. If they require help, they must go through the adult organisation Orange Door, where they must sign an adult intake form filled with questions that are only relevant to intimate partner violence. Often what is recommended to children by Orange Door employees who are supposed to help them is to drop out of school to work full-time, likely dooming career prospects, socially isolating them and cutting them off from any chance of following their dreams or making an impact in the world.

Children are being advised to drop out of school to work full-time by government representatives because the government refuses to protect children because they are too old. No young person should have to choose between learning and a life free from fear. I urge the minister to save lives and do their job to protect children in Victoria, including those aged 17.

### **Gambling addiction support**

**The ACTING SPEAKER:** The honourable member von Möller will be discussing gambling addiction support. If any member of the chamber wishes to leave, they may do so now.

**Angelo von MÖLLER:** My speech is addressed to the Minister for Mental Health, the Honourable Gabrielle Williams. Over the course of the last month I have been speaking to people across Victoria. You have all independently brought up or mentioned their concerns about the treatment of Victorians dealing with gambling addiction. Why is it that there are zero residential public gambling rehabilitation facilities in Victoria? New South Wales has them, South Australia has them, why don't we? This is a gross negligence and a massive fail of mental health care. Most people currently incarcerated as a result of their gambling addictions are there as a result of severe untreated, trauma-induced mental illness. They require intensive, supported treatment in specialised facilities with access to all forms of mental health, not to be locked up without it.

### **LGBTQIA+ youth leadership**

**The ACTING SPEAKER:** The honourable member Peterson will be discussing community leadership for LGBTQIA+ community and youth. If any member of the chamber wishes to leave, you may do so now.

**Ryan PETERSON:** I would like to call upon ministers Harriet Shing MP, Minister for Equality, and Natalie Suleyman MP, Minister for Youth. For some these are dark times. Over the last few years we have seen the pendulum swing back onto the LGBTQIA+ community, with a small, angry minority of the population making us public enemy number one – us, who simply want love and acceptance without caveats or boundaries; us, who simply want to feel safe in our community, work, schools or the places we call home; us, who simply want to live our lives. Combine this with the vitriolic rhetoric already levelled at those between the ages of 14 and 25 and you have the recipe for a generation who feel invisible, a generation who are told their opinions do not

matter, a generation who are told that their identity does not matter. Our generation of queer people will lose their voice if something is not done soon.

Since I came out as gay in 2014 I have fought to have my voice heard. I was overlooked for school captain as I was not masculine enough, not good enough at sport. I was denied SRC president of my senior secondary school in 2017 and was given less support and treated as less for years on end when I was lucky enough to be given leadership roles. It did not take long for that voice in my head to start sounding like, 'I'm not good enough – full stop.' In a sense I was fortunate. I was ambitious, and I felt I had something to say. It may not have even occurred to some at that time that I am gay. For a while that got me by. I was tall and broad-shouldered and had a deep voice. How could I not be straight, right? I had the benefit of the doubt, and that got me a long way. But there came a time when I needed to cast aside the privilege of not being too gay. I wanted to be a champion for my community, to speak with strength and conviction and to believe that I mattered.

To my queer members of the house: you have a voice. You are valid. You are strong. Now is the time for the voices of our LGBTQIA young people to be shouted from the rooftops. Now is the time for us to be heard. Now is the time for us to be respected. Now is the time for us to lead, because for every young, successful person like them that a young LGBTQIA person sees, the brighter their dreams become.

### **Drug decriminalisation**

**The ACTING SPEAKER:** The honourable member Wickramaratne will be discussing the decriminalisation of marijuana and drugs. If any member of the chamber wishes to leave, you may do so now.

**Dimithri WICKRAMARATNE:** Honourable member Wickramaratne, Youth Leader of the Opposition of the 37th Parliament. My speech is addressed to the Minister for Health, the honourable Mary-Anne Thomas, whom I had the pleasure of meeting on 27 June 2023. In this moment I am here to profess one thing and one thing only, and that is: we must stop the senseless war on users of illicit drugs and instead focus our efforts on prevention, care and, ultimately, long-term decriminalisation.

Acting Speaker, aren't you tired of hearing about the hundreds of Victorians – as much as 500 – many of them being young people, who are sadly lost to us due to drug overdose, year on year? Aren't you fed up by the efforts of some in our local communities who are eager to unjustly vilify true victims of excessive substance abuse? Is the Acting Speaker not ashamed by the fact that we should have a black market for drugs at all, which is run by thugs, bullies, wealthy organised crime syndicates and all of the sorts of criminal entities that have zero qualms targeting those from broken families, the working class, the socially lost, marginalised minorities and anyone else who is too afraid to fight back?

On election night in 2018 our Premier declared that our state is the most progressive state in the nation. Well, I hope he and his health minister understand that bold claims require a bold vision. I am not ignorant of the political challenges – the pundits, the unreasonable reactionaries – that stand in the Victorian government's way, but where there is a well-thought-out will, there will always be a way. Therefore I call on the health minister and the government to initiate a process which will lead to a future where those who smoke or consume cannabis are not criminally prosecuted and where safe injection rooms are more widespread across our great state and not just located in one inner-city suburb. The Victorian government had taken a page from the commonwealth government in 2011 by pursuing an agenda of regulation, discouragement of incentivisation and taxation of all illicit substances for recreational use, akin to what was done with tobacco. Even though we all know about the detrimental health risks associated with smoking tobacco, no-one has been foolish enough to ban that drug, knowing all too well that a criminal element is just waiting to create another black market. Please, Minister Thomas – it is time. It is just time.

**The ACTING SPEAKER:** We have no more time for any other adjournment matters. I do apologise to the very few people I have left on my list. The house is now adjourned.

**Motion agreed to.**

**Youth Assembly adjourned 3:41 pm.**

### *Closing Ceremony*

**Council members entered chamber.**

#### **Welcome**

**The ACTING SPEAKER (Paul Groenewegen):** Good afternoon and welcome, everyone. For those of you who have not met me, my name is Paul Groenewegen. I am the Assistant Clerk, Procedure, and Serjeant-at-Arms here in the Legislative Assembly. My colleague over here Keir Delaney is the Assistant Clerk, Procedure, with the Legislative Council. We would like to thank all of you – the YMCA in particular and all of the participants – and everyone who came along this week and participated. I know speaking for Kier and me we have been really impressed with all the debates this week. It has been a fantastic week. Give yourselves a round of applause, because you have reached the end and you have done really well.

*Members applauded.*

**The ACTING SPEAKER:** We have some really special guests who are going to come along and address you all this afternoon. Without any further ado, I will introduce our first speaker, who is a member here in the Legislative Assembly, the member for Point Cook, Mr Mathew Hilakari.

**Mathew HILAKARI (Member for Point Cook):** Thank you so much. Thank you for having me here today. Of course I would like to start by acknowledging the traditional owners of the land, the Wurundjeri people of the Kulin nations, and I want to pay my respects to their elders past and present and any Aboriginal people here joining us today or joining us online, I understand, for most of the week. We are at a really critical juncture for Aboriginal people, not only in Victoria but nationally. This is probably the most important year that we have really had in Australia for Aboriginal people since the referendum in the 60s. Take the opportunity to be involved, to be part of the debate and to understand the debate. Make your voices heard, just like you have made them heard this week.

I would like to acknowledge of course Miora Trainor, the Youth Governor; Dr Lindsay McMillan, the YMCA Victoria board chair, who I met just a moment ago; and Máiréad Doyle, the Acting Deputy Electoral Commissioner, Victorian Electoral Commission, who plays such a fundamental role in politics in Australia. Politics in Australia works well because we have electoral commissions both nationally and at a state level who are beyond politics. It is incredibly important. You can see where it goes badly in places like the United States and some of the states and the poor decisions that are made by electoral commissions and politics over there. They are something that we have really got to hold onto and value. I would like to of course acknowledge John Pesutto, the Leader of the Opposition, who has very kindly made this time available.

I am the member for Point Cook, and I am honoured to join you at the 37th YMCA Youth Parliament. Thirty-seven is a big number for youth parliaments, so you should all be proud and remember the point in time that you are here. I have had colleagues in the Labor Party who tell me about their times in the Youth Parliament. They remember it very, very fondly, and they went back repeated times and then later on as support staff.

Natalie Suleyman, the honourable minister, is who I am representing here today, the Minister for Youth and the first Muslim woman to be part of a cabinet. Victoria is changing. I see it in this room. I see it in the community that I represent, which is the most multicultural community – Point Cook the suburb is the most multicultural in the entire country. You are going to be part of driving this change, of making us a more representative democracy. Stick with it in it. Be involved in it like you are today. The minister of course sends her best wishes. She has been watching the debates. I have heard about that from her and from her staff as well.

One of the debates that I asked about most immediately was voting for people of the age of 16 and above, and I am sorry for those who lost that debate; I am very glad for those people who won that debate. I understand that that is going to go to the national political parties as well. I am a member also of the ALP national conference. I look forward to getting that correspondence from you. The Minister for Youth Natalie Suleyman is looking forward to getting all of the bills and the debates that have occurred over the last few days. Thank you for sticking with those debates. I understand that you have had some very early mornings, is that right – 7:15 leaving? Okay. Well, you are doing excellent right now. Some of us here have been here for longer debates, long nights and early mornings. Sometimes just sticking with it is actually part of the political process. Politics is about turning up. Those people who turn up make the decisions. You have turned up.

I have got an announcement to make. It is not usual that I get an opportunity to make an announcement, so I am very glad that this is the first big announcement that I am making with all of you. The Andrews Labor government is committing \$660,000 to continue the Youth Parliament and the youth press gallery. It covers four years of funding. Congratulations – you are a big part of making that happen.

*Members applauded.*

**Mathew HILAKARI:** No government commits this sort of money lightly. We commit it because we know the importance of making sure that we get the politics right, now and into the future – the debates that you have had here that contribute to our politics, the debates that you will continue on the pathways through your life. The room is full of big ideas and aspirations. Hold onto them. The ideas and the aspirations that I had when I was younger – some of them I am still working on, some of them I have seen achieved in my lifetime. Marriage equality – that is something I always wanted. It has been achieved. Real action on climate change – we are in the process. We are not all the way there yet, but we have got big ambitions in Victoria. I am sure many in this room will have bigger ambitions than that. Keep pushing us.

I want to mention the outstanding work of the youth press gallery – where is the youth press gallery right now? Thank you for the role that you are playing. The press is incredibly important for our democracy. The press tells the story of what goes on in a place like this. They also choose to not tell some of the stories that go on in a place like this, so we look to your wisdom. It is really important that we get it right, that we tell these things accurately and that we provide a picture of what is going on in places like this. So I thank you for that.

It has been an outstanding week of debate, of democracy. I understand you have got one more day tomorrow together – is that right? Fantastic. Well, take that time to solidify those friendships, collaborate, work on your ideas for the future and succeed. Thank you.

*Members applauded.*

**The ACTING SPEAKER:** Thank you, Mathew. I would now like to invite Mr John Pesutto, who as well as being Leader of the Opposition is also the member for Hawthorn and the Shadow Minister for Youth Affairs.

**John PESUTTO (Leader of the Opposition):** Thank you very much, Paul. Can I begin by acknowledging the traditional owners of the land and acknowledge their elders past, present and emerging. To Mat, to Miora, to Lindsay and to Máiréad and to all of the staff from YMCA and the Parliament who have helped to put this on, thank you. And thank you of course to all of you, members of this Youth Parliament, and to our Youth Parliament press. This is such an important institution now in Victorian democracy. May it continue.

I want to congratulate the government, Mat, on that announcement, and I want you all to know that it comes with bipartisan support. Well done on the work you did. I had the pleasure of listening to some of the debate earlier, and it just makes me – I do not know about you, Mat – feel really inadequate in that you guys are ready to take over the place now.

You know, when I started out many years ago – I was probably a bit younger than you when I decided politics was where I wanted to go – I went to university. I worked really hard to get into university and I came out and as soon as I was out of university I had my first crack at an election, and I lost. And a few years later I had my second crack, and I lost. A third crack – lost. About 15 years later I had my fourth try to get into Parliament – and I lost. So, just when I was starting to think, ‘Maybe politics isn’t for me’, an opportunity arose. Ted Baillieu, who had been the Premier of this state, the member for Hawthorn for many years, decided to retire. And I remember getting the call from someone saying, ‘John, did you hear?’ And I said, ‘No, what?’ And she, a dear friend of mine, said, ‘Ted is retiring. Hawthorn is opening up. Why don’t you throw your hat in?’ And I thought to myself, ‘Well, four losses didn’t kill me; five won’t kill me either.’ So I put my hand up. Ten weeks later I was sitting right there as Shadow Attorney-General.

Then after a really exciting four years in Parliament, we came to the 2018 election and I put my hand up again, and I lost. I call them the wilderness years now, between 2018 and 2022, but I went through a process of self-discovery and thinking about what I could do better to come back, and so I contested the 2022 election, and I won. There are no guarantees in politics, but the message of that tortuous story I have put you through is that you never give up. Public life is a bit like that. Whether it is your own aspirations to serve on behalf of the

people in this majestic chamber and/or to fight for a cause that you believe in passionately, you just do not give up. The fact that you are here says everything about how determined you are to make the world a better place and to leave it in better shape than we found it, right?

You probably found sitting in this Parliament today that your passions were excited, weren't they? That is what this place does to you, and sometimes you look at question time and you think, 'What are those people doing, getting worked up?' Well, we get worked up because, as you know now with firsthand experience, the business we transact in this house and you as youth parliamentarians transacted in this house is for the people. There are no easy questions that reach this table. Everything that comes here is hard, and it comes here because it could not be determined anywhere else. So it falls on serious people to determine those questions, and they are not easy.

I always say that I was not just elected to represent and serve the people who voted for me. As I sit in that chair there, my responsibility is to try and look at every side of the question, and yes, you have to make decisions ultimately about where, in my case as a party, we are going to land on an issue. But that responsibility I hope you will have one day when you are sitting in these seats – or some of you might be sitting up in Canberra, but hopefully all of you will be in here. It will be the responsibility you have too.

It is very fulfilling, as Mat will attest, to sit here, and it is not easy. I can tell you that at times it is very difficult to determine questions because our state is complex. Our country, as great as it is, as imperfect as it is, consists of many different communities and peoples of all different backgrounds, and that is a beautiful thing. I am a product of it too. My parents came here from overseas, from Italy, and I am one of five kids they bore here. I can tell you they never thought I would come here, growing up in country Victoria, but one of their children has made it here, and it is good to see all parts of the globe represented in this fantastic chamber here today. But I want to convey to you that you have demonstrated by your participation in the important institution that this is that you are committed to transacting this work on behalf of the Victorian people.

The only other thing I wanted to say to you was that, like I had in my bizarre journey of in and out of Parliament, we all have different journeys to this place. There is no textbook on how you should get here, no certain journey. You just have to find your own pathway, and you have to back yourself and just always remember, as I am sure you do, but I say this wherever I go, that there is a difference between ambition and purpose and remembering why it is we are here and who it is we are serving. I am always conscious of remembering that I might be the Leader of the Liberal Party and the leader of the coalition and the Leader of the Opposition in Victoria but my first responsibility is to the people, whether they voted for me or not, and no-one is omniscient and knows everything about everyone. The only way you do that as a good representative and servant of the people in this place is to talk to people and most importantly to listen, like really listen to people and understand their life, their aspirations and their anxieties, and then working with people like Mat, despite the differences we might have politically, work out how we can advance the common good on behalf of all people.

Really, it comes down to you. I look at all of you and see the future. I am very proud of you. I wish I could have listened to more of today. You will find your own journey. You will look back on these days, and they will be days you remember fondly. I did not quite have the same journey, I must say. But I look at my early years of political involvement, and they help forge you. Everybody, be proud of what you have done and what you will do. I know you will do great things for our state and our country. Just know that we are all proud of you too. Well done, everyone.

*Members applauded.*

**The ACTING SPEAKER:** Thank you, John. I would now like to invite Dr Lindsay McMillan OAM, who is the chair of YMCA Victoria.

**Lindsay McMILLAN:** Thank you very much, Paul. I would like to acknowledge the traditional owners, as other speakers have, past, present and emerging. I believe that they are the future, just as you are the future. To Miora, to Mathew and to John, I acknowledge you.

I simply want to say what an amazing experience it is to be in a room of dynamic, inspiring young people. Just to listen to your debates and your adjournment debates has power behind it. I think that what is enclosed in the dynamic nature of the energy within this room is something that you will take with you forever. There is no

doubt the purpose, what you are here for, is not only to change your lives but to change others' lives. At the YMCA we believe in the power of inspired young people, and there is no doubt that you are the inspiration of our future. There is something about the YMCA that has a future in it, and that is because of you. I am a great believer and supporter of the future of young people, and after 37 years of Youth Parliament there is something that is very powerful about just listening and being part of your journey.

Also something that I would have to say is: do not take lightly what you have experienced. It will change your life. We know that the Youth Parliament changes lives. You will change your career aspirations as an outcome of what you have experienced over these last few days. You will actually have new friendships and relationships that in your career trajectory you will say, 'Weren't you at Youth Parliament? I was too.' The future here is basically in all aspects of life in Victoria, Australia and beyond. Do not underestimate what you have achieved here: it will change your life, there is no doubt about that. It will change your life. What I want you to feel on behalf of the YMCA – we are great aspirational journey people – is that we want to be part of your journey, wherever you go. Never have we had the need for young people's voices to be heard more than today. It is really important for you to feel strongly about your voice, to have the power behind your voice and to feel that collectively you can make a difference. You are making a difference. You will make a difference. Just hold firm to that.

We have 68 bills that have gone through this program that have impacted the Victorian community and beyond. This year the Youth Parliament participants proposed 20 new bills, new ideas and new solutions to issues that will impact Victorians. The power of this is just enormous. You can actually look back and say, 'I was part of that debate that changed the lives of Victorians.' We look forward to seeing which of these 20 new bills will be enacted and shape the future of the state.

It is also wonderful to hear the power of the press gallery. Well done to you. It has been a delight to keep up to date with what you have achieved. Again, many of you will go into journalism, I am quite sure about that, and many of you will take on roles both here and overseas that will actually be the germ of a future career. Well done to you.

It is my pleasant duty to deliver some thankyou's. Certainly thank you to the President and the Speaker for allowing us to be part of the two chambers. We also want to thank the staff here in Parliament, and I think we should thank them for their work.

*Members applauded.*

**Lindsay McMILLAN:** We also want to thank: the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing for your commitment to the program, as announced just a few minutes ago by Mat; and the electoral commission people, who are the neutral players amongst all of us and all of you – again, wonderful to have them part of our world. It is also a very special thankyou to Tessa Buchanan, who has been the marvellous program director across the last two years. Well done.

*Members applauded.*

**Lindsay McMILLAN:** I just want to leave you with a story. It is a story that is set in 1941, when Sir Winston Churchill, the Prime Minister of the UK at the time, was asked to deliver what we regard these days as the commencement speech at Harrow College in the UK. There are variations on the theme that this speech is the shortest speech that ever was delivered. If you can hear Winston Churchill's gravelly voice, it resonates with this speech. The myth around it is he said it 11 times and sat down. There is a little bit of a myth about it, and John has picked up a little bit of what he said. Basically, it goes like this:

never give in, never give in, never, never, never, never – in nothing great or small, large or petty – never give in except to convictions of honour and good sense.

The variation on that is never give up, and it is said 11 times. So this gravelly voice says, 'Never, never give up.' So he emphasised each of the 'never, never's, and at the end this pause to 'never give up'. Never give in, and never give up your aspirations in what you want to achieve.

Lastly, after that short story, let me just do one beautiful expression of thankyou. You are part of a journey of 37 years. This was germinated in an idea of the president of the YMCA at the time, Marcia Pallett. I am the current chair of the YMCA Victoria, which is regarded as, I think, the second-largest YMCA in the world, with

a staff of 5500 young people. We are basically young people – I am young because I have got no hair; I am young at heart. But the joy about this is that Marcia Pallett created this idea 37 years ago. She has been here during the last few days listening to your speeches and the debates. She is a remarkable person. We want to acknowledge you with a gift, which I will give you later – a little plaque, Marcia – but thank you.

*Members applauded.*

### **Presentation to officials**

**The ACTING SPEAKER:** It is now my pleasure to hand the floor over to our four leaders, the two leaders from the Legislative Assembly and our two leaders from the Legislative Council, to make some presentations.

**Krushnadevsinh RAVALJI:** Before I begin, on behalf of my fellow chamber leaders I would like to acknowledge the traditional owners of the lands on which we meet today and pay our respects to elders past and present and those in the room.

Thank you to the incredible staff here at the Parliament of Victoria for your ongoing support of the program. Thank you to the Speaker and the President for the use of the chambers and building, including house department staff, Hansard and broadcast, catering, security, IT and cleaning. This program is impossible without your ongoing support, so thank you.

As Youth Premier, to my fellow youth parliamentarians and the youth press gallery: yes, this journey ends here, but the changes to occur – and real change – are just beginning. And, yes, change is slow, frustrating and can be hard, but with love, community and belief, we can and we will get there. Thank you.

**Ella SHELDEN:** You guys will have to excuse my voice. I must have spoken too much these past couple of days. Thank you to the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing for your generous support of the program, making it possible for more young Victorians to access this life-changing experience.

**Dimithri WICKRAMARATNE:** Firstly, I would like to share the sentiments of the Youth Premier and his deputy in acknowledging everyone acknowledged thus far and his kind words. I would like to also acknowledge the traditional owners of the land we meet on today, past, present and emerging. As Leader of the Youth Opposition representing my side of the chamber, I would like to also thank the Victorian Electoral Commission for running our Youth Premier elections and especially for your ongoing support in assisting more young Victorians to engage in civics. Thank you so much.

**Gabriel PASCOE:** Finally, a big thankyou to YMCA Victoria for your commitment to empowering young people and for 37 years of the Victorian Youth Parliament, and a special thankyou to Taskforce volunteers for your countless hours in helping bring this program and this unique experience to life.

*Members applauded.*

### **Presentation of best speaker awards**

**The ACTING SPEAKER:** It is kind of a difficult but also a really pleasurable opportunity for Keir and I now – the staff have been working on this during the last three days, both those at the table and those members and Taskforce members who have been fortunate enough to sit as chair – to name who the best speakers for the Assembly and the Council have been over the last three days. To give you a bit of background on how we do this, for those of you who are football fans it is a bit like the Brownlow Medal. We have a little voting card. We give three votes to who we think is the best speaker, two to the second best and one to the third best speaker.

I have to say this is about, probably, the 10th Youth Parliament that I have been involved in one way or another, and the contributions that we have witnessed this year have been as high a quality as any I can remember. I really want to commend the fact that the vast majority of you used up your time, pretty much to the last second. It is actually quite challenging, I know; 5 minutes or 2 minutes does not sound like a lot, but when you are standing up in here and speaking in front of a lot of people those 2 minutes can seem like 2 hours. So really, well done to everyone for using up that time and using every last second available. I know the members when they are in here want to make sure that they use every second as well so they can get their contributions on the record.



Without further ado – I do not want to single out anyone for high praise, because I do not think that is fair. It is probably just easier that we mention the one person who won the vote count here in the Assembly. It is my pleasure to announce that Wani Saifudin was the winner of the award here in the Assembly.

*Members applauded.*

**Syazwani SAIFUDIN:** Hi, everyone. I really was not expecting that, so thank you to everyone who thought I did a good job. None of this would have been possible without my Hoppers Crossing team, who supported me along the way, my chamber leader, my training director and my leader Anna, who supported me from the very beginning. Wherever you are, Anna, thank you so much. And thank you to YMCA and everyone here for making this possible. It is so exciting, and I hope I continue to improve my speaking abilities. Thank you.

*Members applauded.*

**Keir DELANEY:** Congratulations. I will announce the winner of the Council best speaker, but before I do, a few quick shout-outs. Thank you to the parliamentary staff who worked in the chambers over the few days. Thank you particularly to the star organisers from Parliament's point of view, Tom Mills, particularly Sarah Cox as well and Juliana Duan for her work as well. Thank you to security – to our Wilson family, having a tough time at the moment. Thank you to catering, the cleaning staff, broadcast and Hansard – thank you, guys – and particularly the members who gave up their time to come in and share the debates. I know they all really enjoyed it. Thank you to all those people.

The winner of the best debater in the Council for this year is Allyza Anne Catapang.

*Members applauded.*

**Allyza CATAPANG:** Wow, I did not expect this. Thanks, guys. Firstly, I would like to thank my chamber as well. I would like to thank my team, Orbost. Thank you for giving me the chance to be able to speak for you guys. I would also like to thank Lily for encouraging me as well. Thank you so much YMCA as well for giving me this second opportunity. I would not be here without you guys. Thank you!

*Members applauded.*

### **Handing over of bills**

**The ACTING SPEAKER:** Finally, I just want to introduce – or welcome, invite – the YMCA Youth Parliament Governor Her Excellency Miora Trainor to address the Youth Parliament. Thanks, Miora.

**Miora TRAINOR (Youth Governor):** I would first like to acknowledge the presence of Mr Mathew Hilakari, the member for Point Cook; Mr John Pesutto; and Dr Lindsay McMillan for your contributions to the closing ceremony and your statements. It is always an honour to have you come and talk to us. I would further like to acknowledge Máiréad Doyle, the Acting Deputy Electoral Commissioner of the VEC, who is in the gallery up there. I would also like to again acknowledge and deeply thank Marcia Pallett, the former YMCA president and founder of Youth Parliament. You have created such an important program, and I am honoured to have got to know you throughout this week. You truly are my role model, and if I can achieve even a modicum of what you have, I will live a full life.

Everyone can breathe now. All the debates are done. It is a relief off your back. It was an incredible week. These youth parliamentarians have debated their ways through a jam-packed week with such grace and such passion and kindness for each other. We have heard debates on such important topics that are extremely prevalent for the youth of Victoria. We have heard about topics such as lowering the voting age, increasing access to regional living, travel emissions, sustainability, hostile architecture and education on all aspects.

Youth parliamentarians and youth press-gallerians have tasted what it is like to really have a seat at the table and to demand that they and their passions and concerns be taken seriously. I cannot stress enough how amazing and important it is for the youth of Victoria and for the youth of Australia to feel heard and that they matter. By being here you are all showing that this is possible, that our thoughts on the governing of our state and our country matter, and that we are so much more than 'young' people. Every young person in this room is a change-maker, and I know that is such a buzzword and that along with 'future leaders', you all hear it all the time, but it is true. You are the future of our parliaments, you are the current advocates and leaders of our

generation, and you are all the past achievements and dedications you have made to a better future that have led you to these chambers.

I said earlier this week that for many of the youth parliamentarians this is the first time that they will ever have been in these chambers. They may not have thought that they would ever make it into here and they may not ever have thought they would be taken seriously and that their concerns would be voiced. But I can now say that this will not be the last time. I am sure that many of you will be in this chamber, and that it may not be the last time that you will be taken seriously. I think it is going to be very hard to ignore all of the people that are in this room. You are such fierce advocates for your causes, and that is something to recognise.

A wise person once said, 'Only the young can run,' and I have never believed that more than now. Watching everyone in this room start walking at the start of the week and being really hesitant in debates, then starting to sprint and run in the last debate – I know in the Council it was very fiery – is the typical ending to a Youth Parliament week, that is all I can say. It has been the biggest honour and highlight to have watched all of you grow and become more passionate in your speeches and more confident and surer in yourselves. I am so proud of you all, and I hope that you feel this sentiment about yourselves.

We have passed 18 bills this week out of 20, many of them being unanimous, which is a big achievement. It is no small feat. I am honoured to present these 18 bills to the government for their review and consideration on behalf of the young people of Victoria.

### **Bills presented.**

*Members applauded.*

**Miora TRAINOR:** There you go – it is out of our hands now. We have done all that we can, and I am sure that we all will not stop advocating for the things that we have talked about this week.

### **Youth Parliament Program Director**

**Miora TRAINOR:** Next, I want to thank everyone that has gotten us here today: the clerks, the parliamentary staff, the VEC and the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing as well as our dedicated Taskforce.

I especially want to thank our program director Tessa. It was an honour working with you this year and watching the change that you have implemented into the program come to life. You make such a difference for both the Taskforce and the participants. Tessa lives and breathes this program – I think everyone on Taskforce knows that. It is always on her mind, and this is so clearly shown by how effortlessly and amazingly she has managed to revive this program post COVID. She not only revived it but made it one of the most accessible, supportive and welcoming parliamentary programs out there. She really deserves a massive round of applause.

*Members applauded.*

**Miora TRAINOR:** As Tessa prepares to pass on the program director baton, it is selfishly comforting to know that she will still be part of youth services and will continue to work at the Y and share her compassion and kindness with young people. But upon the sad loss of Tessa, another amazing person has taken the challenge of filling the big shoes of program director, and it is a relief to know that these shoes are being filled by our very own lovely Georgia. I know that this program is in very safe hands with Georgia, and whatever she does with this program I am certain that it will be amazing.

*Members applauded.*

### **Naming of 2024 Youth Governor**

**Miora TRAINOR:** Now, the moment that I know a lot of people have been waiting for: the announcement of the new Youth Gov. It has been a whirlwind of a year, and it has gone in the blink of an eye. With another Youth Parliament ending, so does my role of Youth Governor. It has been the biggest privilege to be able to amplify the voices of all young people, not only in this room but across Victoria. It is even more of an honour to announce that the Youth Governor of the 38th Victorian Youth Parliament is Kaitlin Woolford.

*Members applauded.*

**Kaitlin WOOLFORD:** Thank you, everybody. As I mentioned in my speech last night, ‘My lordy!’ This has been a long time coming. I am very excited to represent all of the young people across Victoria; to continue to spread my love, appreciation and passion for this program into the next year, working alongside Georgia and our future Taskforce, whoever they may be; and to be your advocate for change. As James Fiford from the VEC constantly reminds us, politicians are public servants, and I shall be the youth of Victoria’s public servant. I shall serve you and not myself. I love you all. Yay!

**Miora TRAINOR:** With that, I officially declare the 37th Youth Parliament closed.

**Youth Parliament adjourned 4:40 pm.**