

PARLIAMENT OF VICTORIA

YMCA YOUTH PARLIAMENT 2025

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL CHAMBER

Monday 7 July 2025

2025 Youth Governor: Lily Trethowan

Program Director: Kaitlin Woolford

Geelong Youth Parliament

Friday Nuneza
Imogen O'Shannessy
Hayden Digby
Taia Hayter
Shanay Jacobs
Georgia Neicho

Hume City Council

Fatima Khurram
Layla Ktaifan
Alison Vong
Ammar Mahmoud
Ella Saji
Atena Kashani

Kyabram P-12 College

Patrick Henderson
Killara Heywood
Matilda Sowter
Xander Griffiths
Lachlan Rodriquez

Mildura Rural City Council

Alissa Ovenden
Darcie Hessey
Lila (Alex) Senior
Molly Pavilach
Yuwaluxshayan Kannan
Taneshia Shaw

SECL Youth Leaders

Kris van der Kamp
Madina Hakimi
Hamid Tawasulli

Golden Plains

Kenzie Dawber
Declan Davidson
Ash Crawford

John Fawkner College

Hamayle Asmat
Maryam Nasim
Helal Beirouti
Adongluge Fadiet

Manor Lakes P-12 College

Sandy Ganesh
Avani Bolugoddu
Maddison Goodchild
Devna Karthigeyan
Maithili Lal
Bodhi Collins

Newhaven College

Gabriel Di Falco
Miranda Zalunardo
Jasmine Ruffin
Tilly Stecher
Matilda Feehan
Nissa Campbell Walker

The Huddle

Hamza Mohammed
Nuradin Mohammed
Charlie Clarke
Crystal Compton-Robins

Opening of the session

The ACTING PRESIDENT (John Berger) took the chair at 10:05 am.

At 10:05 am the Clerk read the following:

Proclamation for holding the 39th YMCA Victorian Youth Parliament

Whereas the Victorian Council of YMCAs wish to develop a project which will:

provide young persons with a state forum to express their views on matters of concern to them;

provide the state government with bills which would express the concerns and expectations of youth, and which could be acted upon by the government; and

provide the opportunity for young persons to gain public speaking and debating skills and develop an interest in their own parliamentary system by actually being involved in the parliamentary process.

and whereas the Honourable the President of the Legislative Council and the Honourable the Speaker of the Legislative Assembly have graciously consented to the use of the Legislative Council and the Legislative Assembly chambers for this purpose;

and whereas the Honourable Natalie Suleyman, Minister for Youth, has agreed to receive the bills passed by this assembly.

now therefore I, Lily Trethowan, Youth Governor, command the selected members of the YMCA Victorian Youth Parliament to attend Parliament House on 7 July at 10 am for carrying out such business as the YMCA Victorian Youth Parliament shall deem appropriate.

Given under my hand on 7 July 2025.

Lily Trethowan
Youth Governor

Opening speeches

Usher of the Black Rod announced approach of Youth Governor.

Youth Governor entered chamber.

Legislative Assembly Youth Parliament members, with Acting Speaker Lister, attended in response to Youth Governor's summons.

National anthem sung by Danjo Nazareno.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (John Berger): I call upon Wurundjeri elder Mr John Terrick to perform the welcome to country.

John TERRICK: Good morning, everybody. I am an elder, John Terrick, of the Wurundjeri clan. Wominjeka Wurundjeri balluk yearmenn koondee bik – welcome to Wurundjeri land. I feel privileged and honoured to be invited to welcome you here today, to gather on the land and country of my traditional custodians, the Wurundjeri Woiwurrung clan. This country is alive with the footsteps and voices of our ancestors –yours and mine alike, young and old. Today is special as we gather to open this space and listen deeply, especially to the voices of our young people. In our culture young people are not just our future, they are our present. They carry the hopes of our elders, the strength of their ancestors and the wisdom of old ways, even as they step forward into new paths. We know a strong community listens to their young ones. It nurtures them, uplifts them and gives them room to speak their truths. Let us listen with open hearts and minds to honour the courage and knowledge of our emerging young people. Young voices will lead us with respect and a spirit of connection to country, culture and each other.

The ACTING PRESIDENT: I call on Mr John Lister MP, member for Werribee.

John LISTER: Thank you, Acting President. It is an honour to be here today at the opening of the YMCA Youth Parliament. I have to say I am a little bit wiggled out, being in the wrong house. I was observing with the member for Mornington that usually I just do a cursory glance over to the red side to see what is happening and then I go back to our business on the green side, so it is an honour to be here today. Before I begin I would like to echo the acknowledgement of country and pay my respects to elders past and present. I thank Wurundjeri elder John Terrick for his welcome here today. I acknowledge that this is the start of NAIDOC Week, a week where we look to celebrate the achievements of our First Peoples here in Australia. My name is John Lister, and I am the proud member for Werribee in Melbourne's west. I am delighted to be here today representing Natalie Suleyman, the Minister for Youth. Minister Suleyman sends her apologies and asked that I pass on her best wishes for this year's Youth Parliament program to you all. I would also like to acknowledge my parliamentary colleagues Mr Berger and Mr Crewther; Youth Governor of Victoria Lily Trethowan; Dr Lindsay McMillan, the chair of Y Victoria; Electoral Commissioner Sven Bluemmel; and Marcia Palette, the founder of Victorian Youth Parliament.

Young people's ideas, skills and voices are constantly shaping our state for the better, helping us to build a brighter, safer and more prosperous future for all Victorians. That is why this week matters here – because, to put it simply, it is about your future and listening closely to your voices, perspectives and ideas about what that future should look like. I am delighted that in its 39th year our government is continuing our partnership with Y Victoria to support the Victorian Youth Parliament program. We know that this program has a long history of bringing young people together to share ideas for legislative change and policy reform. As some of you know, there is a long list of these that have led to real, serious change in this state. In total over 30 policies that started in Youth Parliament have gone on to be implemented. Some notable examples are banning single-use plastics, making wearing bike helmets mandatory and most recently making public transport free for people under the age of 18, which we will see start from January 2026 – a real win for many of you here today. Now it is your time to come together to lead, to collaborate with your peers and to have your say on the issues that matter to you, because your voices are powerful, your experience is valued and your actions can help us to pave the way for a brighter future for all Victorians.

The Allan Labor government is committed to building a state that puts young people front and centre. That starts with recognising that young people are best placed to tell us what they need. We have backed that through our nation-leading youth strategy, *Our Promise, Your Future*, which was built with young Victorians like you for young Victorians. It has built incredible programs like this one and put young people at the heart of decision-making. That commitment to what young people need is something we delivered through last year's launch of YouthNav. The YouthNav digital platform is connecting more young people to practical information, helping them develop key skills, including finding a job, moving out of home and having their say. Designed by young people for young people, it offers information on topics young people told us they want to know more about. It is a reliable, accessible and inclusive resource, and it is another way that we are championing young people and working alongside them to build a stronger, better Victoria.

As someone who was at a secondary school just six months ago, teaching persuasive texts and speeches, let me reiterate this point: you matter, and we are listening. This is an opportunity to shape Victoria's future, and I am so excited to hear from you over the coming days in my role as Acting Speaker in the other place. Usually we would rev you up at this point and congratulate you on what you have done, but I cannot help myself, as an ex English teacher, but to give you just that little bit more homework. That is why I am challenging you to leave this place and take the skills you have honed back to your peers and communities. It is all well and good doing this in Spring Street, but where it matters is back home.

When I started here this year, I said out loud what many MPs in these chambers have swimming around in the back of their minds keeping them up at night. We are here because the people back home put us here. We are their voice. It is why I actually got my students from old school to write my inaugural address, because I am here as that voice for them. We are the voice for the people back home. That is why people continually refer to me as 'Werribee' – which is a bit weird, to be called a suburb. We have got 'Mornington' over here. It is very weird when someone gets up and says, 'There's Werribee walking past.' What? How did the whole town get here? It must have been busy on the train this morning. They call me 'Werribee' rather than 'John', but it is not the worst name I have ever been called as a high school teacher. It is quite nice actually, to have that change. But I think it says something about what we do here in this place: we are here to represent where we come from. All of you have come from such diverse places today: a shout-out to Manor Lakes, the Grange and North Melbourne, all of these places and regional Victoria as well. You are their voice for the next few days here in Spring Street, so go back home, be that voice in your own communities and do not be afraid to speak up. It is worth the detention sometimes.

Also it would be remiss of me to not give a shout-out to the very important group of people who are here alongside you and have been there along the way. Can we recognise the hard work of our teachers and education staff who have helped you prepare for this event and prepared you along the way to be doing what you are doing. I think our teachers and our education staff do a huge power of work, and it is important to continue to keep that in mind. All those boring English lessons, all those humanities lessons, all those times when you have stared at a diagram of these two places on PowerPoint, it is now coming to life for you.

Finally, I would like to thank Y Victoria for organising and hosting this event every single year. This building is a cornerstone of Victorian and Australian democracy. There is no better way to use it than to host you all here, as you will be the ones to carry this democracy forward. With that being said, I am pleased to help officially open the 2025 Victorian Youth Parliament with you all here today.

The ACTING PRESIDENT: I call on Chris Crewther, the member for Mornington.

Chris CREWTER: Thank you, Acting President. Firstly, I would like to join with each and every one of you in acknowledging the traditional owners of this land, the Wurundjeri people, and their elders past, present and emerging, and I thank John Terrick for his welcome before. I would also like to acknowledge fellow parliamentarians here today, including my Acting Speaker opposite, the member for Werribee. We might actually get away with calling him John Lister because we are sitting in the upper house. I would also like to acknowledge each and every one of you youth parliamentarians, distinguished guests and everyone here today.

I was talking before with John, and we were reminiscing on when we both started in Parliament. I believe John is the youngest member of the Legislative Assembly at the moment. I was also the youngest member of Parliament in 2016 when I started in the federal Parliament at the age of 32. I believe that the maximum age of youth parliamentarians is 25 – is that correct? In several years time a number of you, I am sure, may well be members of Parliament as well and you could even become a member of Parliament at an even younger age, as people like Wyatt Roy and others across Australia have proven in the past.

It is a great honour to be here today. For those who do not know me, my name is Chris Crewther and I am the member of Parliament for Mornington, which covers more than just Mornington. It is obviously named after one of the suburbs in my area. It is a great honour to be with you here today to officially open, along with John and others here, the 2025 Victorian Youth Parliament. I will also say from the outset that this year's YMCA coordinator Della was actually one of my fellow participants in the same year in Youth Parliament in the year 2000, so to kick off this millennium. It is a very small world indeed. He has obviously committed a lot of sins along with me to still be here, but he is a great person and I know he did a terrific job back then and continues to do a great job today as well – except these days he has a sort of regular-colour hair, but I believe he had green hair when we did Youth Parliament in the past. I am not sure if any of you know that.

To all the youth parliamentarians taking part, congratulations. This is a remarkable achievement. You have taken the initiative to step forward to represent your peers and to bring your ideas into these chambers. I actually did Youth Parliament back in the year 2000, as I mentioned, but also the year 2001. I was a repeat offender. But we did this in this chamber as well in the upper house, so even though I am in the green house now whenever I do Youth Parliament I am in the red house. It is something to be proud of that each and every one of you are taking part in this Youth Parliament.

To just give you some background on me, I originally grew up in Horsham in western Victoria. Is anyone here from country Victoria or the west of Victoria? We have got a couple of representatives here. I grew up in western Victoria and my spark to make a difference was seeing and experiencing significant disadvantage when I was growing up in my community. Because of where people lived or because of their socio-economic circumstances and so forth, I saw many families, including mine, struggling to put food on the table. That is one of the reasons I got involved in Parliament, because I strongly believe in equality of opportunity and that people should have the opportunity in life to use their gifts and follow their dreams irrespective of their postcode, irrespective of their socio-economic situation and no matter what your circumstances beyond your control are.

In year 11 and year 12 I firstly through Horsham College did the Victorian YMCA Youth Parliament, which was held here, but also at Camp Manyung which is in Mount Eliza. A year later I did the Australian YMCA Youth Parliament. I am not sure if they still hold the Australian YMCA Youth Parliament, but because it was the centenary of Federation in 2001 we also held it in Victoria because Melbourne was the capital of Australia back in 1901, as many of you may be aware. We held that here and in Camp Manyung in Mount Eliza as well. Interestingly, even though I grew up in Horsham, I now actually represent Mount Eliza at the parliamentary level. I represented Mount Eliza at the federal level and also at the state level, which is a coincidence given I did both the Victorian and national youth parliaments. I have seen through Youth Parliament and through Parliament the power of policy and lawmaking and its capacity to change the lives of others. You can all make a difference in your lives. Whether you pursue Parliament or any other pursuit, you can make a difference. If you see an injustice, if you see a wrong, then stand up. Even if it does get you a detention, stand up and do the right thing. Stand up for those around you.

To go a bit more into my background, I did all my schooling in Horsham in a little town called Murtoa, which is really in the sticks, and I finished high school at Murtoa Secondary College and Horsham College. I also grew up with Tourette syndrome but was not officially diagnosed until my early 20s. That actually meant a lot of bullying at school for what were deemed to be habits or tics at the time, which along with other significant bullying I experienced gave me a deep sense of empathy and determination to put myself in other people's shoes – to stand up for others who feel like they do not have a voice and to fight against injustice. I was not born with a silver spoon in my mouth and had to work hard to get to where I am. After Youth Parliament I went on to study law and did a couple of masters degrees in international law and diplomacy. Some of you may be at school now, some of you may already be studying at university, but whatever you follow, follow your dreams and follow what you want to do in life. I worked in legal, community and advocacy roles both here and overseas – in Kosovo in the former Yugoslavia – before being elected to federal Parliament and before now being elected to the state Parliament as the member for Mornington. Today I serve as the shadow assistant minister for housing and the Opposition Whip in the Legislative Assembly. So I am not used to being in the red house, if I can call it that, but I do try to keep people like John in line along with the Labor Whip.

It is interesting, people see question time and they often see the Liberal Party and Labor Party fighting during that time, but we actually work quite a lot together. A lot of bills that we pass through Parliament are agreed to by both the Liberal Party and the Labor Party, probably about 70 per cent or so. We also work in committees together and often come to mutual agreement on topics. There is a bit of that camaraderie, just like, say, with a football team where you might be on opposing sides and you might have disagreements. At the end of the day, though, we are both often trying to achieve the same outcome: we want a better Victoria. We want a better life for Victorians, for families, for kids, for grandparents and everyone else. Sometimes we have different views as to how to achieve that end goal, but at the end of the day we can understand each other as, I guess, fellow football players, in a way. We have that mutual respect for each other, which probably goes beyond what you actually see in the media, where you just see the Liberal Party and the Labor Party fighting a lot.

I note as well that my housing portfolio has enabled me to stay connected to community and really see the challenges people face, like what I saw growing up in Horsham in western Victoria, including housing insecurity and the cost-of-living crisis. For example, on the Mornington Peninsula we actually have the second highest level of homelessness in metropolitan Melbourne. It is really an issue we have to deal with and have to take action on. My whip role also keeps me on my feet a lot, as I have to organise basically the whole opposition team, at least in the Assembly, and make sure members are where they need to be – that votes run smoothly and that our message is coordinated and effective. I have to work very closely with the Labor Whip to ensure that both the government and opposition are coordinated to ensure Parliament can run smoothly. I am also a member of the opposition through the Liberal Party. I joined that party because of its belief in freedom, opportunity and hope – if I can summarise those beliefs. John would have joined the Labor Party perhaps with slightly different reasons but because of his belief in that future for Victorians.

But what really excites me is you as young people. You as young people are actually actively participating in democracy through Youth Parliament and beyond – putting forward bold ideas, debating real issues and challenging the status quo. Youth Parliament is not just an educational exercise; it is a space where real change can begin. In fact many proposals, as John mentioned, from past youth parliaments have gone on to shape actual legislation and policy. One of the proposals we put forward back here in the early 2000s was a compulsory dyslexia test in schools bill, and Della may actually remember that, because that was debated in the YMCA Youth Parliament, I think in the year 2000. It was one of the ones where the opposition and the government mutually agreed, and we actually had no dissenting voices in the end. It was probably one of the rarer situations during Youth Parliament at that time.

But even in Parliament, as I mentioned, we are not always fighting as you see in question time. Many bills do pass with joint support, and we work on many issues together, such as organ and tissue donations, which I worked on through the Legal and Social Issues Committee. I am currently deputy chair of the Electoral Matters Committee, looking at the by-election that occurred in Werribee and things that went wrong and went right in the election where John got up. We are looking together to actually improve democracy in this state.

You do not need to wait until you are older to make a difference. It feels like yesterday – 25 years ago – that I was actually standing here in this chamber. I do not know where the last 25 years have gone, but sometimes time flies. Make the most of your time here. Make the most of your time over the next 25 years or less, because you can make a difference, and you are already doing that right here, right now. You can make a difference no matter where your life takes you, so make the most of this opportunity. Listen carefully, speak passionately and do not be afraid to question how things are done. We need voices like yours in our democracy today and well into the future. I wish you all success and an inspiring week in Youth Parliament. And who knows, some of you may return to this chamber one day as elected members, just as we do with the government's Treasurer Jaclyn Symes, the shadow environment minister Brad Rowswell, me and perhaps others I am not aware of. I sincerely hope you do. Congratulations for being involved. All the best for your great success in the week ahead.

The ACTING PRESIDENT: I call upon Dr Lindsay McMillan OAM, chair of the YMCA Victoria.

Lindsay McMILLAN: Acting President, Her Excellency Lily Trethowan Youth Governor of Victoria, John Terrick – John Lister had to leave; he reminded me he had to leave early, and I acknowledge him – John Lister and alumni Chris Crewther of the YMCA. It is a great story, and you could actually be doing the same in years to come. There are three or four members I think within the Parliament who have done YMCA Youth Parliament. It is a great testament to the power of what happens in this room.

To youth parliamentarians, press gallery members – put your hand up press gallery members, up at the top there; well done, you. And to the Youth Parliament volunteer taskforce, hands up. Let us give them a round of applause for their work. The special guests – I too would like to acknowledge John's excellent welcome to country to all of us and pay my respects to his elders and others, past and present, and I extend that respect to all First Nations people and to the young people that he is involved with. He told me about that.

Since 1987 the YMCA Victorian Youth Parliament program has always been by young people for young people. Of special note is Marcia Palette, former president of YMCA Victoria and the creator of the Youth Parliament, which Marcia and her husband Richard continue to support and attend each year. So Marcia – in pink – let us give Marcia a round of applause. It is a remarkable achievement for somebody who started this 39 years ago and continues to come every year. To actually be part of your world I think is just wonderful. Next year we are 40 years. Marcia and Richard look forward to seeing you here next year. Just imagine what that means when you say 40 years by 100 or 120 young people – I have not done the maths; somebody else can do the maths. Just imagine what the impact of that is across Victoria, Australia and the world by the power of what Marcia put into place. Well done.

Moving on, the matters raised by you today as decision-makers – many have been enacted into Victorian legislation and sparked government initiatives. As Chris mentioned, 70 bills have now been adopted over the course of those 39 years. The one that is notable is free public transport for young people under 18, as mentioned, and that was brought to this Parliament by the Boroondara team last year. It is a testament again to the power of young people. This new legislation, started by young people like you, is in line with one of the Y's key global four pillars of impact: to create a just world for all. In this space at Youth Parliament the Y amplifies your voice, but we leave the debates and matters completely to you. You are youth parliamentarians. This year you have chosen a wide range of bills covering social and environmental matters from education to women's health, mental health, family violence, community gardens and more. We are looking forward to robust debates, critical thinking and new learnings.

I would also like to thank the Y's volunteers on the Youth Parliament taskforce. Every year a dedicated team of talented young volunteers contribute hundreds of hours and lend their passion and expertise. This year is no exception, and simply, this program is not possible without our dedicated volunteers. Thank you to the President and Speaker for the use of these awe-inspiring chambers. This access and opportunity make the experience exceptional, memorable and transformational. Thank you to the Parliament of Victoria staff, who are always in the background. You are incredibly supportive of this program and our young people. Our ongoing partnership makes this unique, transformational and possible for the young Victorians who are here today. Thank you to the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing for your commitment to this program and support to provide accessible opportunities for young people across Victoria. Our appreciation is also extended to the Victorian Electoral Commission for its ongoing support and endeavour to engage more young Victorians in civic discussions and debates – thank you to Sven.

Finally, I would like to leave you with a story that has intrigued me for some time, which lies at the core of what it means to have not momentary success in life but lasting success in life, and to this end I have been following Angela Duckworth, a professor from the University of Pennsylvania, and her groundbreaking research over many years, where she looked at the key ingredients that separate those who succeed over time. She researched and provided enormous evidence to what I am going to tell you now. She found that there are two essential ingredients to succeed over time, and they are passion and perseverance over the long run. She calls this 'grit'. Grit is not merely talent or a moment of brilliance; it is the steadfast determination to pursue your most ambitious goals regardless of the obstacles you may face. In your roles as emerging leaders you are entrusted with shaping the future. The path ahead will be challenging, laden with complex issues and, at times, disheartening setbacks. Yet it is precisely in these moments that your grit will drive you forward. Embracing passion means that you must hold a deep and genuine commitment to the causes you believe in. Let the passion fuel your service to people and inspire policies that bring about meaningful change.

The second element of grit, other than passion, is perseverance. When confronted with difficulties or criticism, remember that each hurdle is an opportunity to build resilience. It is about grit. As Duckworth's research illustrates, success is not an immediate outcome but the result of continuous effort day in and day out. It is about showing up when the going gets tough, learning from each experience and relentlessly pursuing your vision for a better world. It is about grit. As parliamentarians you are the architects of progress. Your work is demanding, and solutions often emerge not from a single stroke of insight but from persistent effort over years. Each debate, each piece of legislation and each moment of service are a testament to your grit. Let the ingredients of grit guide you, transform challenges into stepping stones and use every setback as a springboard for growth. Today I urge you to embody the spirit of grit. Allow passion and perseverance to be your constant companions. With these qualities you will not only overcome the hurdles before you but also leave an indelible mark on society, proving that every real change comes from those who are willing to put in the work day after day, fuelled by a deep love for their mission. Do it with grit.

The ACTING PRESIDENT: I now call upon Ms Lily Trethowan, the Youth Governor of Victoria.

Lily Trethowan (Youth Governor): Welcome everyone. Thank you all for coming today. Firstly, I would like to thank the Wurundjeri elder John Terrick for his welcome to country. I would also like to acknowledge the traditional lands which we are on today, those of the Wurundjeri people of the Kulin nation. I pay my respects to elders past and present and extend those respects to any Indigenous people here with us today. I would like to thank the member for Werribee John Lister, the member for Mornington and program alumnus Chris Crewther and Dr Lindsay McMillan OAM, Chair of YMCA Victoria, for taking the time to be here with us at Parliament House. I would also like to thank Danjo Nazareno for singing the national anthem.

I would also like to acknowledge the presence of Sven Bluemmel, the Victorian Electoral Commissioner – we appreciate the continued support for our program and for our young people – and also Marcia Pallet, who is the former president of YMCA Victoria and founder of the Youth Parliament program for the state. Marcia built the foundation of this program. We would not be here today without her, so I thank her very much personally for that and for her continued presence every year. I would also like to acknowledge the partners who have contributed to and supported us through programs – such as the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing, Y Victoria and Y Australia. Again, we thank you for your continued support.

The moment also seems right to acknowledge our lovely volunteer taskforce, who are responsible for breathing life into this program, as well as our program director Sheepy and Y Victoria youth services manager Della for all of their hard work and support. They have worked so very hard, and they will continue to over this coming week. Not only are they an incredible support system for me and everyone else, they are what success, dedication and loyalty look like. But these are not the only people that we have to acknowledge – all of you. Our participants have come from every corner of Victoria, from the north-west corner at Mildura to the south-east corner and Phillip Island and South Gippsland and literally everywhere in between. ‘Ambitious’ does not even begin to describe the level of love, passion and excitement our participants have. I am sure all of you up there will see for yourselves – but to be honest, who am I to say?

I am Lily Trethowan. I am currently a preservice teacher aide and for the past three years have been a part of the taskforce, mentoring and supporting young people with writing their bills in Parliament House. I can truly say that it has been one of the honours of my life at 22. This year, however, I am the Youth Governor of Victoria. I stood for it partially because since my first year I knew I had found a place where everyone could be themselves and from there rocket past whatever they thought was possible for themselves. The insurmountable amount of pride I felt gave me purpose, gave me hope and gave me strength. It turns out it has that effect not only on those who participate but also those of us on the taskforce who organise and lead, because in my case at least, the 18-year-old me who was not sure of herself at all could become someone she was proud of as an adult, someone who can actually help people.

This is what Youth Parliament has taught me, this is what it has taught countless others and this is a space where we felt safe like we belonged and that someone had faith in us. I thank and honour that in a lot of ways, both in the program and in other parts of my life, and I believe that you all can as well. This program is about finding your footing, your potential, particularly in times when you may feel loss, loneliness or trepidation in your own lives. Now, around 18 per cent of Victorians are aged between 12 and 25. This equates to over a million Victorian residents, a million young people in Victoria – 999,900 young people are currently living in Victoria, and you are the voice for all of them. Many young Victorians have come to this program to create change to better the lives of Victorians, and some have succeeded. This is why advocating for things and empowering others is very important. With respect, honesty and care, you can help not only others but yourself realise your potential and your ability to make others’ lives better.

Since Youth Parliament began in the long way away 1987, over 60 bills have been passed into current Victorian legislation, the most recent of which was the free public transport for all Victorian students, as debated by our 2024 Boroondara team. I remember them; they were cool. Change happens within these walls, and you are part of the change that will happen for the future. You can change things, you can help others and you can help yourself. Nobody expects perfection and nobody expects sure answers, but we do expect your voice. This program is a way for others to hear it, particularly those with power and responsibility in this house, and for it to be acted upon.

This week we are going to hear debates on a lot of things: education, swim safety, the environment, access to public transport and so much more. Every single bill is going to be reported on by our lovely youth press gallery members. I cannot stress enough the magnitude of the contributions that our young people have made. People say it is a marvel; they say it is a surprise at how capable and passionate our young people are. It should not be surprising at all. Youth Parliament proves not just the significance but also the tenacity of Victoria's youth. They are everywhere, in all communities and in all demographics – 1 million young Victorians. They are and will continue to be seen. This program is instrumental in maximising your voices in this legislative body. It is my hope then that during this week you will raise your voice. It is already channelled in your bills – your ideas that are deserving of recognition and intention. Show others and yourself that you are willing and able to contribute towards a deserving world for everyone – those you have met recently, those you love, those you work with, those you represent and everyone else you have never, ever met.

You made it. I always knew you would. I do not want to have to mention again that your skills, your drive and your ideas should not be surprising to anyone at all. I would, on behalf of everyone else, like to thank you for it all and your willingness to commit to this program. You are needed and you are more than capable. Regardless of what you believe of yourself, that much is true. Nobody expects perfection and nobody expects sure answers, but we do – and you must always remember this – expect your voice. I now declare the 39th Victorian Youth Parliament officially open.

Members applauded.

The ACTING PRESIDENT: The Youth Parliament will proceed with business in the Legislative Council and Legislative Assembly chambers at the ringing of the bells. I would like to thank everybody for joining us this morning. You are invited to morning tea in a few minutes.

I was introduced as the President, but my real name is John Berger, and I am the member for Southern Metro. Unlike my colleagues down here who have one district to look after, I have 11. You can have a look at Southern Metro. If you were to draw a line from here to Port Melbourne, follow the bay along to Sandringham, cut up into Ashwood and then look at Prahran, Malvern, Kew and Hawthorn, they are some of the districts that I look after. It is split up into two areas with my other colleague Mr Batchelor. It is a fairly diverse group. We look after two councils. I have Boroondara and Stonnington, and as you can imagine, there are some pretty significant issues that need to be addressed in those particular regions.

This is my first term in Parliament. Before that I was with the Transport Workers' Union for 27 years. I am coming up to nearly 40 years as a member of the Transport Workers' Union, so it has been a long time in the making, coming into this place. But opportunities to come in here and represent working-class people and the views of others in the community is a real challenge, and that is something that I enjoy. You as Youth Parliamentarians: I look forward to the debates that are coming up in a few hours. I will be chairing a couple of them as we go along between today and Thursday, so I am looking forward to seeing some of the ideas that you present on some of the topics that you are speaking on. With that, I would like to invite you all now to Queen's Hall for some refreshments.

Sitting suspended 10:51 am until 11:32 am.

Members statements

Matilda SOWTER: I would like to give thanks to all the people who have helped my team in progressing to where we are today, such as Ali Wallace, Sam Birrell, the honourable member Peter Walsh, the Victorian Electoral Commission, our many, many mentors and our parents. I also thank the Parliament of Victoria for hosting us and the Y for making this possible.

Maryam NASIM: On behalf of our team, I would like to thank and express my gratitude to John Fawkner College for giving us the opportunity to represent them. I would also like to thank our resource member Mr Dean Moss for all the hours he has put in in helping us. I would also like to extend my gratitude and thanks to our chamber manager Jamie for helping us through this whole ordeal.

Georgia NEICHO: I would like to thank Greg Chadwick for overseeing the program for our team, the Geelong council for funding our team, Alison Marchant for meeting with us and providing an insight into Parliament, Alicia for helping to coach us, Jamie for guiding us through the program, the Y for giving this opportunity to young people and for giving us a voice, and Parliament House for providing us this opportunity to run this program and allowing us to be in their fun areas.

Darcie HESSEY: On behalf at the Mildura team, I would like to thank all the members of the YMCA taskforce and the Lake Dewar Discovery Camp staff for their hospitality and effort in organising this for us all. I would like to thank Marnie, our team's mentor and chamber leader; Dawn and the Mildura Rural City Council for making this all possible; and the Victorian Electoral Commission for funding this. We also thank the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing, and Ali Cupper and Conor Pall who joined our meetings and gave us advice.

Avani BOLUGODDU: On behalf of the Manor Lakes team I would like to thank Manor Lakes P-12 College for funding our participation as well as presenting us with such a wonderful opportunity. We would like to thank our resource person Gordon Webb for his organisation, advice and enthusiasm; also our teachers, particularly Mr Pearce and Mr Bryant, for supervising our meetings and inspiring us. Thanks to our parents for their endless love and support. And of course we would like to thank the Youth Parliament taskforce for creating such a warm and welcoming atmosphere throughout the whole program, especially Marnie and Jamie. Thank you for being such a great help with the making of our bill and speeches.

Layla KTAIFAN: On behalf of our team I would like to extend our thanks to Hume City Council for the chance to represent our community. We would also like to express our gratitude for the appropriate resources and funding that were provided to us by the Hume City Council. Their continued commitment to community initiatives has played a vital role in helping us deliver meaningful outcomes throughout this program. Additionally, our heartfelt thanks are due to our team's resource person Richard, as well as Em, whose unwavering support and guidance has been invaluable throughout our journey of Youth Parliament. They have organised meetings, resources and a space for us to thrive throughout the program. I would also like to extend our thanks to our chamber mentor Jamie for creating a positive and engaging space for us to really participate in and learn from. Finally, thank you to everyone who had a hand in making Youth Parliament possible. We would not be here today without you.

Declan DAVIDSON: On behalf of the Golden Plains Youth Parliament team I would like to thank Bannockburn P-12 College, the Y Bannockburn and the Golden Plains shire for providing funding. I would particularly like to thank Alisha Nurnaitis and Sarah McCamish for their unyielding support. Your efforts made this possible.

Kris van der KAMP: I would like to thank South East Community Links for bringing us together; Adam, our resource person; the Victorian Electoral Commission for funding this; Jamie, our chamber leader, for all their support throughout this; all the YMCA taskforce for making this possible; and Parliament House for hosting us.

Gabriel Di FALCO: First of all, on behalf of the Newhaven College team we would like to say thanks for allowing us to have this opportunity to be part of this program. It is a real privilege and honour to be a voice for young people, especially in the South Gippsland and Phillip Island area but also in wider Victoria, so we would like to thank Newhaven College for supporting us to do this program, as well as the Phillip Island YMCA. We would also like to thank the honourable member for Bass Jordan Crugnale for meeting with us, as well as the RMIT department of environmental studies for giving us valuable insight for the development of our bill. We would also like to thank Jamie Campbell and Lennon Jablonka for meeting with us as we developed our bill. We are really grateful for all of your assistance to develop a really good piece of legislation. We would also like to do a final thanks to YMCA Victoria and the taskforce for their hospitality – making us feel really welcome and supporting us throughout this week and beyond.

Hamza MOHAMMED: I would like to thank the Huddle for providing me with this opportunity. I would like to thank the Y for facilitating the program and I would also like to thank the Victorian Electoral Commission for funding the program.

Matters of public importance

Women's health

The ACTING PRESIDENT (John Berger): I have accepted a statement from the YMCA Youth Parliament proposing the following matter of public importance for discussion:

That this house endorses the continued and increased investment in women's health care, including regarding education, the provision of free period products in public spaces, reducing stigma and the efficiency of and access to diagnoses and treatments.

Atena KASHANI: Good afternoon everyone. Before I begin I want to acknowledge that I will be speaking about systematic neglect in women's health and I will be talking about medical trauma and inequality, so please be listening with care. I rise today as a proud sponsor of the women's health reform of 2025. This motion responds to the long-awaited urgent need to address the deep inequality and inequity in the current healthcare system, which continues to neglect and disadvantage more than half of Australia's population: women. This motion recognises that women's health is not a niche area that does not need to be addressed. Women's health is a matter of public importance. It is a matter of national wellbeing, and it is about respecting and understanding basic human rights. Women make up 51 per cent of Australia's population, yet they are continuously misdiagnosed, undertreated and overlooked in the healthcare system. Why? This is because the system is built on male centred and focused research and assumptions. Think back to your PE classes. Did you ever look at the anatomy of a woman when analysing the respiratory or cardiovascular systems? Was it ever looked at? I do not think so.

The statistics are confronting and terrifying: 43 per cent of women in Australia have experienced mental illness at some point in their lives, and 87 per cent of women aged 65 and over are living with continuous chronic conditions. Did you know that diagnosis for women can take up to 10 years more than it would for men with the exact same condition? It is a disgrace. This motion seeks to address that. It seeks to remove those very systemic barriers that prevent awareness, accessibility and availability for women's health care. I cannot stress enough how this bill is not just about having more support in services. We demand a change in mindset. This is about shifting the dismissal of women's pain and suffering and blaming it on hormones and reproduction. It is no longer enough to just say that we value women in our society when our health, our safety and our rights to basic health care are constantly being left in limbo and neglect. Every second, every day, every month, every year that this motion is not passed, more women fall through those very cracks that were formed by a broken system that never had their health in mind or their interests.

I say enough is enough. It is time to finally put in a healthcare system that does not put one gender on a pedestal while continuously crushing and stepping down on another. Is it not time for us to have a healthcare system that reflects real lives, real bodies, real humans and real women? Why are we so opposed to having equitable access, educational awareness, research and data collection and creating a culture of safety when it comes to women's health in the year 2025? I say it is time to change that and it is time to wake up. Please do not just vote for the women that you know in your lives personally. Do it for the ones that are being unheard. Do it for the ones that passed away without being able to share their hurt and their trauma and their story. Do it for the millions of women that are being misdiagnosed and are currently waiting for you to say yes. Let us stop allowing history to repeat itself over and over and over again. It is time for us to finally step up and deliver a healthcare system that is just, that is fair and that is equitable for all. I commend this motion and I hope that you all agree with me.

Sandy GANESH: The opposition agrees that women's health care should absolutely remain a priority of the state, but we question whether this motion is the right way to pursue this. Firstly, the Victorian government has already committed to installing free period product vending machines in over 700 locations across the state. By the end of this year the number of machines is estimated to cross 1500. These can be found in public places including hospitals, courts, libraries and many more. Over \$23 million has gone into this initiative. Additionally, period products have been available at Victorian schools since over half a decade ago. This \$20.7 million initiative commenced in the third school term of 2019, installing sanitary product dispensers at every school in Victoria by the second term of 2020. Following this program, the state has invested \$3.9 million and a further \$15.5 million to continue to support this effort.

Looking at these numbers we ask the government: is women's health care the issue that needs more investment right now? We as the opposition can certainly think of a few other matters that are heavily underfunded. For example, each year approximately one in five Victorians suffer a mental health condition. Around 45 per cent of Victorians will experience poor mental health over their lifetimes. These illnesses carry substantial economic burdens and desperately need increased investment to support sustained treatment. Elderly care is another area that is considerably underfunded, with many aged care homes operating at a loss. This leaves the homes with no choice but to increase consumer costs, which makes care unaffordable for many older Australians. We are not denying the need for adequate funding in women's health care, but increased investment in this one area inevitably means cuts in others, which could very possibly lead to catastrophic outcomes.

Furthermore, although the distribution of free period products will help a large demographic of menstruating people, it may hinder access for others. Free products will unfortunately mean that businesses who manufacture and sell these items will be less incentivised to ensure their quality. For those who are not often in areas where free sanitary products are distributed and who do not have a choice but to buy them, their menstrual health will be deeply impacted and compromised by products of worse quality. Additionally, unmonitored access to these items means that they will very likely be tampered with. Leaving healthcare products exposed, particularly ones that must be immaculately hygienic, risks the health of those who use them, not to mention that individuals will take advantage of this system and hoard items, making them inaccessible for others. Although it is enormously unfair, the truth is that ultimately the very people this motion is trying to protect will suffer the consequences of the actions of those with ill intentions.

Lastly, increased access to period products will not mean equal access. As of now, in a majority of locations free products are only available in women's bathrooms. This means that those that menstruate but do not identify as women will not be getting the same level of access. Also how would the kinds of products available be determined? People of different demographics will not be comfortable with or accustomed to the same kinds of sanitary products, so who decides what will be available and in what proportions? Overall, once again the opposition absolutely supports the improvement of women's health care, but this motion is underdeveloped and therefore cannot be effectively implemented.

Hayden DIGBY: This motion proposes to enact real change and make serious strides in closing the gender health gap. Historically in Victoria, medical practice and research has disproportionately benefited men at the expense of women. Passing this motion has the potential to be a real catalyst for change and a massive step in making right the serious injustices that have been going on for hundreds of years. Victoria is one of the greatest places on earth, so let us make it even better, right this historical wrong and bring medical research and funding into the 21st century where they belong.

Maddison GOODCHILD: While the intent behind this motion is understandable, and we absolutely support better outcomes for women's health, we must be realistic. This proposal, as it stands, is simply not economically sustainable. Free women's health care sounds great in theory, but in practice it comes with a massive price tag. Rolling out free period products in public spaces across Victoria, expanding education programs and increasing access to diagnosis and treatment – all this costs money, a lot of money, and in case we have forgotten, our state is already facing a growing budget deficit. At a time when hospitals are understaffed, housing is unaffordable and our education system is stretched thin, we have to make a hard decision about where our money goes. This is not saying women's health care does not matter; it is about recognising that we have limited resources, and many urgent areas are competing for funding. And let us talk about long-term economic consequences. When the government steps into providing everything for free, including products like pads and tampons, it reshapes the market. Only large-scale producers who can afford government contracts might survive, pushing out smaller businesses and reducing competition, which will hurt local businesses. Supporting women's health care is essential, but support has to be smart. What is being proposed here is a blanket solution that risks blowing budgets, creating more economic pressure and limiting long-term sustainability. We want progress but not at the cost of practicality.

Maryam NASIM: I rise today to ask: how many more women must suffer silently to access the help that is their right to a fulfilling life? How many more must be turned away, misdiagnosed and left waiting for months, years and decades? The truth we face is undeniable. Victoria is facing a crisis in women's health. Fewer and fewer GPs are training in obstetrics and gynaecology, specialist appointments are scarce, and for women living with conditions like endometriosis, a disease that already steals life away from them, this shortage is not a convenience. It is agony prolonged by a system that is failing them. Only 15.4 per cent of women with endometriosis have a chronic disease management program. Many are forced to just see one overstretched provider, leading to persistent symptoms, delayed diagnosis and devastatingly low satisfaction rates – only 24 per cent. But what does this mean in real terms? Missed school days, lost wages, mental health struggles, pain that shapes our lives. And the gaps run deeper still: one in three Australian women and half in rural areas have no GP who can provide a medical abortion. Nationwide only 11 per cent of them can provide this, and many public hospitals barely offer it at all, denying women the control of their bodies. Reforming women's health is not a luxury; it is an urgent and necessary thing. By investing more in ob-gyn providers, creating faster, fairer access to diagnosis and treatment, we can spare the suffering of thousands of women, reducing long-term healthcare costs, and most importantly, we uphold the dignity and quality every woman deserves. Honourable members, this is our chance to show that women's pain will no longer be dismissed, delayed or denied. Let us act not just with words but with real reform for a fuller, healthier and fairer Victoria.

Declan DAVIDSON: I would like to echo the collective belief of the opposition that women's healthcare systems need to be reformed. Unfortunately, though, on these discussions regarding total free-of-charge goods, in any capacity, we must also consider the role of the business cycle. Following the removal of all costs of any product will have a detrimental effect on the overall production of it. This total elimination of the cost of period products will result in either massive shortages or cuts to the quality of them. Yes, the government will incentivise production by funding a single entity or a single business, but this just creates a market monopoly. This monopoly is just a longer, more complex way for this business to reduce the quality of these products. These economic concepts are hard to grasp for a lot of people, but the laws of demand and supply are constant. While amazing as an idea, it will actually just create new problems for people who menstruate. Rather than providing free period products, we should instead provide government subsidies for those who cannot afford them. We need to remain realistic. In an ideal world these products would be free. Unfortunately, we do not live in an ideal world. We need to be realistic about how things work and understand that it is just impossible to provide free period products and quality period products.

Friday NUNEZA: Fellow members, it should be considered that in women's health care access to health services, especially sexual health services such as menstrual products and care for diseases such as endometriosis, are severely limited. The affordability of women's healthcare products and resources, such as reproductive care for diseases such as endometriosis and polycystic ovary syndrome, known as PCOS, and menstrual and menopausal products, is severely alarming and they are not easily accessible. The increase in pricing for necessary resources and the lack of bulk billing to pay for the treatment of these diseases is extremely damaging to the reproductive health of women, as the financial burden of addressing these medical needs will restrict them from obtaining the necessary medical care, endangering their health to afford their basic needs. Furthermore the expensiveness of birth control resources and products such as contraceptive products and the costs for procedures such as hysterectomy limit women's ability to safely obtain birth control methods, increasing the risk of obtaining sexually transmitted diseases and even ovarian cancer. While there are initiatives such as oral contraceptives and endometriosis treatments are available on the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme – also known as the PBS – and a new Medicare rebate is available for menopause health assessments, they are not enough to alleviate the rising costs of women's health care. More action must be done, and it is important that this motion is addressed to help achieve equality for all.

Maithili LAL: While the intent of this motion is commendable, giving complete and unregulated access to menstrual products is not only impractical, it is dangerous. Let us be honest: complete, unrestricted access to menstrual products may sound empowering, but without structure it opens doors to misuse at a state that is dangerous and damaging. When products are left completely unattended in public spaces, we risk people taking them in bulk, holding them, reselling them or, worse, tampering with them. Menstrual products are personal, intimate and require pristine hygiene. If these products are left in open areas with no monitoring, we create an environment where contamination is not just possible, it is expected. A damaged tampon or unsealed pad is not just useless; it is a health hazard. And who pays the price? It is not the people abusing the system, it is the very women this motion claims to support. For those who genuinely need access and arrive to find completely empty boxes or unsafe supplies, that is not empowerment but is neglect. We cannot confuse visibility with viability. Access must be safe and sustainable, not just simply available. Without control in place, this motion risks turning a support system into a mess. If we truly care about women, we must ensure the systems designed to help them are built to protect them.

Helal BEIROUTI: Stigma and bias have been a challenge faced by women since the beginning of time. The unfortunate reality is they still exist today. Two-thirds of women in Australia feel discriminated against when receiving care, with statistics showing that 40 per cent of women face bias in sexual and reproductive health, 38 per cent receive bias in areas of chronic pain and 30 per cent face bias alongside their mental health conditions. Imagine being in pain, fearing that your health is impacted. So you go to the trusted doctors of Victoria just to be dismissed, with a smirk left on the doctor's face, causing you to feel invisible and insecure. It is just not good enough. Why should someone feel uncomfortable just because of their gender? Women should not need to feel embarrassed in receiving care. They should not feel judged. Low health literacy has limited awareness of available support and created difficulties in navigating the healthcare system. In 2025 we have developed as a society in respecting human rights and eliminating bias. The fact that this still needs to be brought up is extremely concerning. This matter is a step closer in giving women the required care from our trained doctors, a step closer in making our health system a respected source for everyone, no matter their gender. Let us remove stigma and bias in our system once and for all.

Devna KARTHIGEYAN: The fact that this motion has been proposed as a result of good intentions must be mentioned and acknowledged. However, there are some distinct impediments in this motion that keep it from achieving its purposes, which include appropriate accessibility and equality. Period or menstruation products and other similar women's healthcare products come in several varieties to cater to the needs of specific individuals and their bodily requirements. As mentioned prior by honourable member Davidson, making such crucial healthcare products free of charge will reduce their quality as well as their overall availability. As someone who requires such products for my own health, I have specific types of products that I must use for said health reasons. Numerous other individuals like me have such specific requirements too. This is not an assumption; this is my observation as a user of these mentioned products. For instance, if a young girl on her cycle were comfortable and only able to use pads but the only available free-of-charge products were tampons, what would happen then? Additionally, if an individual were medically required to utilise particular menstruation products and such products were not included within the free-of-charge bracket, this motion and its aims would essentially be forfeited. Importantly, this motion does absolutely nothing to recognise the needs of people of different sexualities and genders as opposed to cisgender women. As of now, women's healthcare products are mostly available only in women's bathrooms. Seeing as this motion does not consider trans or non-binary individuals, for example, how are individuals who identify as such supposed to gain access to women's healthcare products the same way cisgender women may? For a motion that mostly centres around increased accessibility and awareness related to women's healthcare products, this motion, as it is currently, is lacking in both of those aspects.

Kris van der KAMP: While this motion is about advocating for women's health care, we are not drawing a boundary about who deserves health care: we are expanding the conversation. Supporting women's health care is not about exclusion. It is about recognising that women possess bodily functions from which unique health challenges can arise, including menstruation-related disorders and reproductive health issues. We need to recognise specific needs of women's bodies to be able to create a society where it is not as necessary to differentiate between gendered health care, because the system will be fair. We need to correct gender-based disparities and promote fairness. We want to build a healthcare system that includes everyone. Women's health issues have historically been underfunded and underprioritised, and addressing this is certainly not a threat to inclusion. In fact it is a step towards equity, because many non-binary, intersex and trans people also need reproductive, hormonal and gynaecological care. Health care must be nuanced. We can advocate for women's health and for trans health and for non-binary health and for greater access to health care for minorities. They are not competing struggles. They are overlapping struggles for autonomy, safety and dignity. Advocating for women's health means building systems that are responsive to diverse experiences, systems that recognise that not everyone fits into neat categories but that everyone deserves to be seen, respected and cared for. Let this motion pass and take steps forward to creating a healthcare system that is equitable for everyone.

Yuwaluxshayan KANNAN: I stated before that the opposition supports the idea of better health care for women. However, the motion lacks clarity and a clear target, leading to a motion that seems as if it was conceived in a dream. Let us delve into the motion's focus: increased funding, especially when it comes to free period products in public. Apart from what my team has already discussed about the financial burden on the economy and potential misuse, we have to consider more effective alternatives instead, like drop-in centres that provide free period products. Drop-in centres or hubs like these already exist, and instead of putting out free period products in public, we should focus on supporting programs and initiatives such as this to make a real difference, because these amazing programs are severely underfunded, and we know that. Instead of funnelling more money into supposed education, which clearly has not been working, we need to consider changing the content, the environment in schools and overall addressing these systemic issues to reduce stigma. Just upping the number will not work unless we identify and solve these root causes that have plagued our community and left our women suffering. Similarly, other very strong and crucial points the motion brings up are the accessibility and efficiency of diagnoses and treatments. Although having more doctors or machines can help, how about having services such as telehealth being accessible, affordable and effective? The motion fails to consider building upon already existing solutions and would rather just try doing everything anew, which is not just a waste of our time but also of our resources. Overall, although the motion is a step forward in the right direction, it is a slightly wobbly step. When it comes to increasing funding, we need to address these real issues affecting every aspect of this motion and support programs that already exist. Investing more money into an already failing sector will only bring it down further; it is like adding fuel to a fire.

Alex SENIOR: Women with ASD receive a diagnosis much later in their life and often receive misdiagnoses. This is not mentioned throughout the motion and is not considered. I ask the government: how can the government claim to advocate for women's health without intersectional care, for this motion cannot protect the health of all women without considering all women and their conditions?

Shanay GAO-KUHLMANN: I wrote down that very point – that it is not included in the matter. But that does not mean work into women's health is not needed, and that is one thing that will be seen in the future. Likewise, menstrual products not appearing in male bathrooms is exactly why we need to continue looking into women's health. We need to further look into it so that we can make it equal. But if we stop now and focus on other things, that equality will never be reached. Likewise, mental health is women's health, and so is elderly health, as women make up 51 per cent of them, as our speaker mentioned before. The state is facing a deficit, much like its people. The price individuals pay for period products is aiding Australia's financial crisis, because a pad to stop one's bleeding takes precedence over a meal or two. For many who cannot afford menstrual products and medication, they are left less than human, suffering with their blood and pain. Likewise, the matter mentions LGBTQ+; however, the opposition has neglectfully ignored this. Another point I would like to make is that women are always being put second in the healthcare industry. For example, during childbirth a woman is typically situated on her back, which is actually very dangerous and makes the entire process more painful. This is for the doctor's comfort – the one sitting on the chair – so it is easier for them than the mother going through labour. Likewise, men also receive more anaesthesia during certain procedures. For example, a PESA, a sperm aspiration, is performed under general anaesthesia. However, forms of female birth control, such as the IUD, are implanted without any form of anaesthesia, which once more shows us the disparity between men and women's health and why this is needed so much more.

Kenzie DAWBER: When it comes to menstruation, you also must consider the medication individuals buy to assist with it. Medications such as the pill or the rod are designed to either assist with periods or stop them. Pads and tampons are also used to assist with periods. Yes, they both help in different ways, but they still help with periods, do they not? If medications cost money, why should pads and tampons be free when both period products and medication are used to deal with periods? Why should one thing be free but not the other?

Imogen O'SHANNESY: Contrary to what the opposition seems to believe, further investments in period products are absolutely and undeniably essential for all people who have a menstrual cycle. There are already rollouts currently happening in public spaces within Victoria specifically, which the opposition mentioned, which proves that all citizens need these products to be accessible and free for all who may need them. The opposition may try to argue, 'Why do we need more free products available if they are being implemented as we speak?' To that I say: there is always more work that can be done. Any step taken to increase accessibility and decrease stigma and period poverty is a step forward. I ask the opposition this: what is more important to them – free products that are necessary to the needs of our citizens or being concerned about the funding of such initiatives, when funding women's health should be a given, not a right? Does the opposition also believe that rich businesspeople are worth more than millions of women?

Nissa CAMPBELL WALKER: Women's health care has only been an issue raised in recent decades, including in 1995 when IVF was finally allowed for single women and same-sex female couples and in 2008 when abortion was finally legalised in Victoria. The only issue of concern before that was how female reproductive organs would affect men. The deep-rooted, systemic misogyny that has plagued our healthcare system for decades is the number one cause for poor women's health care. Reproductive research focused on men. Contraceptive options focused on men. Research done for a man by a man that dictates a woman's reproductive health is disgusting, and we must see change. Women make up 51 per cent of the global population, and yet they are the group that are marginalised when it comes to effective health care. When pushing for a future that seeks equality for people of all demographics, we must make a stand and fight the injustice that is women's health care.

Ammar MAHMOUD: Women are being diagnosed up to 10 years later than men, not because the symptoms are subtle but because the system is. It is subtle in how it ignores, delays and dismisses and subtle in how it tells women their pain is normal, emotional or just part of their life. That subtlety is deadly. That is not a health gap, that is a health failure. This is not about inconvenience, this is pain being normalised, voices being dismissed and entire lives being derailed. Think about what a decade-long delay really means. It means being misdiagnosed and prescribed pain killers instead of proper treatment. It means mental health spirals from years of being gaslit by a system meant to help you. It means financial burden and job loss, and for some it means fertility loss. The system is broken, not by accident but by design. The research is not there. The funding is not there. The belief is not there. This is not just about endometriosis or chronic pain, it is about a culture in medicine that is comfortable with women suffering in silence. Gender bias in health care is not a statistic; it is a sentence – a decade-long sentence of unnecessary pain. Until we name that bias, fund what matters and treat women's pain as real, nothing will change. Money spent on women is not a waste. In fact it is an investment with the greatest possible return. We are investing in the backbone of our communities. We owe women better than late diagnosis and lifelong consequences. Health care that excludes half of the population is not health care at all; it is harm dressed up in policy.

Georgia NEICHO: On numerous occasions the opposition stated that if period products were to become free, they would be taken advantage of. Yet things like condoms – once again, something for male health – are free. Yet you do not see that as a shortage. The opposition has also stated that quality would deteriorate if these products were given away as free. However, legal standards for period products are already not up to where they should be, and dangerous chemicals are already embedded in things like pads and tampons, which could actually make a woman feel more pain during their period and make it worse. The opposition have mentioned that they want real change, yet how can change be made if they are ignoring their chance to make it?

Gabriel Di FALCO: Women around the world face unique health challenges which require unique treatment solutions, but healthcare sectors across Australia are failing to provide this to a high quality, if at all. The experiences and the symptoms of periods and endometriosis, for example, can vary greatly between every individual. Yet doctors issue the same diagnosis, putting patients dangerously at risk when they are the most vulnerable. The individuality in the care and treatment of Australian women is essential and sorely lacking in the current system. Those suffering from postnatal depression are not receiving the vital care that they require after birth, and with one in seven mothers developing postnatal depression, this lack of targeted care is having detrimental impacts on the lives of thousands of mothers, sisters, aunts and nieces – all of them. Real action must be taken immediately to prevent the damage caused by insufficient care for women around Australia, because until we provide Australian women with health care that is affordable and accessible, we can never claim that our medical system is equitable. The women of Australia are the cornerstone of our society, and it is time we gave them the best possible health care and created a truly equitable healthcare system.

Fatima KHURRAM: The concern that other areas, such as mental health, should be looked at and funded overlooks the fact that women's health not being taken into adequate consideration causes these mental health issues. For women, who make up over half of Australia's population and who have higher rates of anxiety, the lack of adequate health care is a significant factor that contributes to mental health issues. Imagine a woman waiting to be diagnosed. This waiting spans across days, weeks, months and even years. Would this not cause her to fall into a state of depression? Is this not a good enough reason? So when the opposition says that other areas like mental health should be looked at and funded, we say to look at one of the root causes of these mental health conditions and aim to resolve that first.

Bodhi COLLINS: As do many members of this opposition, I support this bill in principle; however, I disagree with how it will be implemented. An example of this disagreement with the implementation of this bill is the provision of free period products in public spaces, which although it is fantastic and would be great in an ideal world, is unrealistic. As we know, people take advantage of these things for the worse. People will misuse products. They will damage the products and they will put the safety of many women at risk, which is greatly unfortunate. But this is sadly the reality that we live in. I ask this government: how will you ensure that this measure will be reformed or worked on to be improved so that the intention of these free period products in public spaces will succeed? Surely there is a better way than just giving away free products in public spaces so they are accessible to everyone, when really they should be going to the people that need them.

Miranda ZALUNARDO: When a woman says, 'I am in pain,' why is she still being told it is all in her head? This is the reality for thousands of women across Victoria, where women's health care is consistently sidelined, underfunded and misunderstood. Endometriosis takes an average of seven years to diagnose. PCOS, pelvic pain and perimenopause are shrugged off as just part of being a woman, when in reality they are serious health issues that deserve proper care and attention. Women are gaslit by systems that are supposed to help them. That is not health care, that is neglect. If you live in a rural or regional area, good luck. Specialist care is scarce and waitlists are long, and for many, access depends on their postcode and their bank account. This is not just about reproductive health, it is about justice. It is about the right to be taken seriously in a hospital room. It is about culturally safe care for Indigenous women. It is about migrant and disabled women navigating systems that were not built for them. Women's health is not a niche issue; it is a public health priority. It affects productivity, education and quality of life. We need real investment in women's health services, comprehensive education on menstrual and reproductive health and a system that listens and acts when women speak, because when women are healthy, society thrives. When they are ignored, we all pay the price.

Layla KTAIFAN: The opposition assumes that funding women's health care means less funding for other areas that are also crucial to address. In reality we should focus less on funding areas that are actually overfunded instead of a system that negatively and detrimentally impacts or could impact over half of our population. Women should not have to feel neglected and unworthy of adequate health care when it is a right, not a privilege; nor should they feel afraid and expectant of negative outcomes if they were to ever experience complications in their reproductive or general health.

Jasmine RUFFIN: The Victorian Department of Health states 'the significance of health, wellness and care of all people and the prevention of avoidable burden of disease' – the key term here is prevention. As previously stated, women constitute 51 per cent of the Australian population, over 12.9 million people, and over two-thirds of these people feel discrimination when receiving care. Does it not seem unjust that appropriate and effective action is not being taken to mitigate this, that systematic discrimination not only financially impairs but physically and mentally harms such a large portion of our national population? Not only do we have a responsibility, but it is an essential requirement to elevate and make changes to support the women of our nation's lives for the better.

Ella SAJI: Unfortunately we do not live in an ideal world. But why do you think that is? An ideal world may not exist yet, but what is stopping us from trying? How can we protect our women when basic women's health is being put at the bottom of our priorities? Through effort we can make a difference. Without it, we will be stuck in the present without moving forward, without considering future generations. Menstrual products are not a luxury, but just a basic need.

Ash CRAWFORD: While reading through this motion and discussing it, I asked the question, 'What constitutes a public space, and how are we going to facilitate this?' Are all of these products going to be distributed widely, and how wide is that?

Patrick HENDERSON: I think that we can all agree that this motion was developed with the utmost nobility in mind to help deliver for the women of this state, and every point raised by the government in support of this bill about why it is necessary is absolutely valid. Unfortunately, this bill does not adequately cover every aspect of women's health care and how it can be improved. There is a lot of talk in this motion and there is a lot of focus on things like free period products, but it does not make any mention of the myriad issues that have been mentioned by the government about the attitudes within the healthcare sector towards women and towards women's health care and their pain. This motion will not help them, and in its current state this motion will be used as an example by future legislators of how women's health care is actually already being taken seriously by the government, when in reality a lot more consideration is needed.

Crystal COMPTON-ROBINS: The opposition's argument that women's health care is costly and economically irresponsible is frankly sexist, when all that is being asked is that there be a levelled-out playing field and that both sexes receive equitable investment. Women are entitled to their human rights the same way men and everyone in between either are or should be. I agree that this motion needs more thought and consideration for people who menstruate but do not necessarily identify as women, but this motion is a fantastic step in the right direction. Doing something is much better than nothing. Furthermore, normalising period products in men's mind too leads to lessened microaggressions and gendered prejudices.

Tilly STECHER: The opposition mentioned that investing in women's health care may come with an enormous price tag, but doesn't all health care? Why is the cost suddenly a concern when the focus is specifically on women? Think about the large investments made into general health care. Shouldn't women's health care have a similar investment considering women constitute 51 per cent of Australia's population?

Taia HAYTER: We the government would like to ask the opposition: how can we protect our women's health needs if they are basically not being met? They are not our bottom line.

Charlie CLARKE: The opposition says that the world is not perfect yet, and we are here to help that. They also ask what is stopping us from trying. A lot of things, unfortunately: people's health, people's livelihoods and people's lives. You want to make a positive change, but we the opposition believe that this positive change needs to be certain – a negative one cannot be created.

Matilda FEEHAN: The opposition states that elderly care needs more funding. What about the women who went through menopause without the correct help and have now ended up with lifelong effects of that? Why do women have to become elderly before they even bat an eyelid? What about the women who had children and were sent home, told that they would be fine after they just went through a trauma that will forever change their lives? Why is it that a woman's whole life changes with issues such as endometriosis, PCOS and postnatal troubles, which change the course of their life, and yet they are just overlooked and viewed as normal?

House divided on motion:

Ayes 48

Noes 0

Majority in favour 48

Motion agreed to.

Sitting suspended 12:29 pm until 1:18 pm.

Bills

Increased Swim Safety Bill 2025

Sponsor: Geelong Youth Parliament

Refuter: Mildura Rural City Council

Introduction and first reading

Shanay GAO-KUHLMANN: I move:

That I have leave to introduce a bill titled Increased Swim Safety Bill 2025.

Motion agreed to.

Read first time.

Second reading

Shanay GAO-KUHLMANN: Before I begin, I would like to alert everyone that this bill discusses the topic of drowning as an integral feature of its importance, and this may be distressing to some individuals. If you wish to leave the house, you may do so now. I move:

That the bill be now read a second time.

Why wait for a tragic accident to occur before we take action? There are terrible possibilities in our Victorian waters that have gone unnoticed for far too long. Instead of waiting for tragedy to occur we can prevent it now by installing the Increased Swim Safety Bill 2025. The bill covers a variety of measures that work towards reducing preventable drownings and eliminating hazards that could lead to incidents in the water. This is particularly considered in a youth context, as Victoria's children and young people are among those at the highest risk of drowning incidents. Royal Life Saving Australia's *National Drowning Report 2024* shows us that there was a 16 per cent increase in drowning deaths in 2023–24, sitting at 323 cases. That is 323 lives lost in Australian waters, and we should aim for zero – zero lives lost in our waters, zero parents stuck mourning their children from water-based accidents and zero families left with a hole in their heart from drowning incidents in Victorian waters. If we can do anything to lower this number, we must try, and that is why we propose the Victorian Swim and Water Safety Board, referred to as VSWSB. It is an implementation board that considers the safety of those in our waters – be it pools, beaches or lakes. VSWSB will oversee a variety of issues that include but are not limited to those discussed in this bill.

Firstly, the board will oversee the implementation of enhanced swimwear regulations. Many do not consider their swimwear when thinking of their safety in the water; however, swimwear visibility as attributed to its colour or pattern greatly impacts the visibility of those wearing it when in the water. Royal Life Saving Western Australia as well as many international sources have told us that certain coloured swimwear can make a child almost disappear under the water, and when it comes to split-second actions, every second counts. Children often drown calmly without splashing, and it only takes 20 seconds. If those 20 seconds are spent searching the water rather than diving in the moment you see your child's bright one-piece, that fact is devastating. Twenty seconds is all that it takes. As such we propose a rating system, almost like that of food or appliance stars, which tells consumers how an official board has rated the product. The ratings will be mandatory on all Victorian-produced swimwear and swimwear entering Victorian stores as an attempt to educate consumers on the safety of their swimwear.

Likewise, increased regulations regarding the certification of swim instructors will be implemented by the board, as currently they exist but are slipping under the radar. The bill ensures that regardless of which institution one is employed in, public or private, all swim schools will be required to adhere to mandatory, standardised courses. That way parents will know the instructor teaching their child actually knows what they are doing. Similarly, extra classes must be passed if swim instructors wish to teach anyone with a disability, as extra care is needed to ensure their safety. This crackdown on swim schools will ensure the utmost care for people's children, so they can send them to class knowing they will come back alive.

Another issue surrounding Australian waters is the safety of our outback beaches and other swimmable bodies of water such as ponds, rivers and lakes. VSWSB will oversee the development and management of a new app containing data from various third-party sources and collate a platform that informs Victorians about the safety of the water around them. There will also be a self-reporting feature so you can report about wildlife or rips and we can all protect each other. Along with a variety of other features, the app will promote water safety in general and prevent accidents in less populated areas.

All of the changes aforementioned and any other necessary information will be presented through an advocacy and awareness campaign aiming to alert the population to potential hazards. This will be done through physical and digital outlets to once more promote safety around the water. As you can see, we are proposing a variety of means to ensure the safety of those in our waters and prevent accidents as much as we can. It may be considered overkill or unnecessary, but remember, 20 seconds is all it takes to lose a child in the water. 323 lives were lost in the past two years in the very water we swim in on the holidays or fish for dinner in. It may not affect everyone, but it affects the lives of many, and therefore we should do everything we can to limit the number of drownings in our sun-kissed state. We love the water surrounding us and should be able to safely enjoy it, and with that I urge all to consider the importance of this bill and how, if passed, it can save many.

Alex SENIOR: Fifty-nine lives is the amount of people who were lost in Australia due to drownings from 2022 to 2023, and a further 122 incidents. Although a relatively small number, I recognise the continued, vigilant effort that is required to keep these numbers low and lower them further. Water and swim safety is an issue deserving of high-level consultation. This is why it is so vital to focus on incident causes and act effectively and efficiently on data-proven strategies to protect Victorians. This bill, however, fails to deliver on every front and will not only not achieve this but endanger limited resources with its misguided attempt.

This bill pressures swim teachers into unnecessary training when current guidelines are already recognised. Training inclusive of CPR and disability training is already required by the relevant teachers; this bill only creates a needless doubling of already implemented measures. As a certified and current lifeguard myself, I have observed firsthand the quality and standard and commitment of swim teachers to their students. They and many like them are undeserving of the criticism they face without any evidence of their contribution to the drownings that are considered in this bill. Additionally the government targets local industry, and Victorian businesses are expected to increase labour with no government directive for mitigation or consideration of the impact on the businesses. Government oversight is made abundantly clear, as they impose already regulated standards and focus on irrelevant factors.

This bill seeks to increase swim safety by targeting factors such as swim-teaching standards and swimmer visibility, causes without proven correlation to drownings. Meanwhile, 36 per cent of state drownings and more than half of the drownings in the Murray River are due to drug and alcohol abuse. Where is the government addressing factors like this? A further 69 per cent of deaths are of males. If the government is actively interested and engaged with swim safety, will they not address these factors rather than punish and demonise local businesses, communities and swim teachers, who are passionate and have a love for their students?

The government shows a lack of deliberation. It is not only shown through its fabrication of swim safety concerns, but the bill itself is disjointed and ineffectual, at best. From the board members and terms to the provision of present standards, it lacks functionality and care. This bill excludes the required involvement with established, recognised and relevant authorities and acts independently from prior government-commissioned data and considerations, none of which are taken under advice in the bill. None of this data is considered in increasing safety. The government claims it is concerned, but this bill only shows the government's limited research and involvement regarding this issue. In an attempt to increase swim safety the government puts the community at risk, while swim safety still requires data-proven solutions.

I strongly advise the government to reconsider the bill's relevance to swim safety, as currently it serves as an inadequate solution to an issue that is deserving of a deliberated focus. The government's inability to target real issues, such as the high percentage of male deaths and the drug and alcohol contribution, shows an inability to recognise faults and shortcomings. This is exactly why I am doubtful of the government's commitment to the issue, commitment to Victoria and commitment to itself. For every single one of these reasons, this bill is unfit for Parliament, unfit for consideration, unfit for Victoria and unfit for law.

Imogen O'SHANNESSY: A key part to defining regulations and spreading awareness to others about concerning and preventable issues is by implementing an experienced board to plan on and enforce ways to address said issues, which this bill is specifically designed to do. An integral component of the VSWSB is the diverse range of both professional and educational experiences the 12 members will bring to the table, which are highlighted in subclause 4.2 of the bill. A key example of this is the appearance of a young person between 12 and 17 years sitting on the board alongside the adult members. This not only differentiates from similar, existing swim safety boards, which highlights the ongoing need for youth representation, but also demonstrates the bill's commitment to protecting children and young people from preventable drownings. To further this point, the VSWSB will comprise three child and youth experts, with the hope of ensuring that children's and young people's protection is at the core of swim safety reforms and regulations. As touched upon in subclause 4.5, the primary role of the VSWSB will include establishing and managing the new initiatives outlined in this bill, such as the swim safety rating scale, a centralised swim safety app and promotional materials related to swim safety. The board will also be central in enforcing stronger swim instructor regulations and ensuring that all swim instructors undertake the necessary training prior to teaching children, through a range of means. The VSWSB is a crucial element of the Increased Swim Safety Bill, as it aims to promote contemporary research and set clear guidelines for safeguarding children, young people and the broader community in the water through the distinctive and diverse group of experts who serve on it.

Darcie HESSEY: Mandating disability-specific training for all swim teachers regardless of their student cohort is an overextension of resources that threatens the accessibility and affordability of swim lessons across our state. Instructors already complete essential training: first aid, water safety and general inclusion practices. For everyday swim lessons these provide a strong, practical foundation. However, requiring all swim teachers to complete additional, intense, disability-specific courses regardless of whether they actually teach students with disabilities is simply not necessary. Let me be clear: targeted training for specialised instructors is important and is required for the appropriate teachers, but imposing this on every instructor, from local swim schools to volunteer-run programs, diverts time, funding and staff availability from where they are needed most. In regional and rural areas swim teacher scarcity is already a major issue. This kind of blanket regulation could force instructors out of the industry or prevent new ones from joining, especially when wages are low and training comes out of pocket. That shortage leads to longer waitlists, fewer lesson times and reduced access, particularly for families already struggling, and the result: lesson prices go up, access goes down and the very children we are trying to protect lose out. Rather than mandating necessary training we should focus on supporting and funding specialised instructors where needed and ensuring inclusive pathways without penalising general swim programs.

Hayden DIGBY: I rise to support clause 5 establishing the swim safety scale. Year round in Victoria we see the same tragic story: families out enjoying beaches and rivers with low visibility, and too often this ends in tragedy. Common swimwear colours and patterns like stripes and dull colours that blend easily in waterways make children incredibly vulnerable and hard to see, especially in a crisis, where 20 seconds means life or death. Preventable drownings steal too many precious lives from our great state, and it falls to us to enact practical, widespread and commonsense measures to reverse this trend. Clause 5 does just that. It creates a simple rating scale of 1 to 5 for swimwear based on visibility in the water. Stores submit their stock for assessment free of charge and the rating is stamped right on the tag. If a piece of swimwear fails inspection this is noted with a warning stamp. It is important that the house notes this is not just about telling people what they can and cannot wear. We would never suggest limiting the freedom of the consumer. This is about enabling them to make informed choices. Being able to spot someone in the water can save a life. This is a fair and practical clause for retailers and provides every Victorian information to save their own lives. I commend this clause to the Council, and I urge all honourable members to back it.

Taneshia SHAW: Forcing Victorian stores that supply swimwear to put these rating tags on all their swimwear is unnecessary due to the stores themselves having to place these tags on. It will include more labour, so in turn employers will have to raise employees' income to overcome this. The Geelong team states that the bill will have no cost to the store, but does that include the raised incomes? Not only that, but where are all the stores receiving these tags from? Having employees do more work, stores will have to raise swimwear prices to combat the pay increase. Also, often employers do not pay the price, meaning employees will be exploited. Having stores in Victoria raise prices but online stores staying at a more affordable price, with consumers going to pay more, means they will be more inclined to choose the cheaper option. It completely defeats the purpose of the tags, so why bother adding them in general?

Georgia NEICHO: Clause 6 of the Increased Swim Safety Bill 2025 mandates essential training for all swimming instructors in Victoria across both public and private sectors. As an ex swimming instructor myself, I am well aware drowning is not just a tragic accident, it is a preventable death. When it comes to the safety of our children and our communities in the water we cannot afford to rely on inconsistent and outdated training standards. Clause 6 addresses this head-on by requiring every swimming instructor to complete a nationally recognised first aid course, the accredited swimming and water safety teacher qualification, and the training to teach children with disabilities. This is about building a standard of safety we can trust. Whether a child is taking lessons at a large suburban pool or a small private swimming school in rural Victoria, parents deserve to know that every instructor has met the same high bar of safety, capability and inclusivity. For too long private instructors have operated in a grey area, some with rigorous qualifications, others with minimal oversight. Clause 6 ends this inconsistency. With regular inspectors, public reporting of instructors' qualifications and mandatory supervision for under-18 instructors, we are saying every child, every family and every instructor matters. This is about protecting lives. This is about raising the bar. Clause 6 ensures that we can trust our children's safety with people that are trained, accountable and equipped to teach every single child, no matter their background or their abilities.

Molly PAVILACH: I ask the government what relevance nine members with no knowledge of swim safety have on a board dedicated to swim safety. With only three swim professionals, how can the VSWSB accurately provide Victoria with increased swim safety? What can a 12-year-old board member provide in regard to swim safety? The construction of the proposed board will cause insufficient outcomes from its roles. It is clear the government has negligently formed its clauses, considering how it has an even amount of board members – so how will voting take place – along with no overarching body to oversee the board. How will the government prevent misuse of power or bias within their board without a structured hierarchy? It is plainly evident the government has not taken the time nor effort to construct its bill effectively. Their negligence in clause 4 directly affects their entire bill negatively. The very body of the bill is inadequately thrown together with no regard or care. This negligence, however, does not halt at clause 4. Throughout the government's bill they constantly refuse to thoroughly explore the topic, which means the government have placed clauses with no connection or similarities within the same bill. For example, I ask what relevance a swim safety rating scale has to the clause directly following it: 'Mandatory Training for Swim Instructors'? Overall, there is no consistency within the government's bill. Their short, vague clauses create an abrupt sense of laziness and carelessness for Victorians that rely on this government to provide them with the best possible improvements for society.

Taia HAYTER: A defining point in the Increased Swim Safety Bill 2025 is the introduction of a Swim Safety Act allowing for promoted awareness of swimming hazards and for individuals to report perceived hazards at any time. This concept already exists in the form of VicEmergency, which gives direct alerts of fire dangers in set watch zones, allowing anyone to stay alert and vigilant when facing one of Victoria's greatest environmental threats. Additionally, the information compiled for this act already exists in smaller, lesser-known third-party sites, creating a clear opportunity to develop a centralised act built for swim safety accessibility. The reporting feature, as discussed in subclause 7.2, creates an opportunity for dangers to be accessibly listed and displayed. This ensures information is accurate and up to date directly from local communities who understand the risks and dangers of the swimmable bodies of water in their area. This includes but is not limited to physical hazards in the form of rips, tides and rocks and hazardous wildlife in the form of sharks, jellyfish and snakes. To assist with reporting, a text line will be created for reporting hazards in remote areas of the state. Finally, subclause 7.3 creates an extensive list of local contact numbers for this act for use in case of local or emergency issues. I would like to conclude by noting that while the app has limited use in low reception to remote areas, it will feature downloadable content and offline resources to ensure protection in even the state's most vulnerable areas.

Alissa OVENDEN: While I acknowledge the well-meaning intent behind the Increased Swim Safety Bill 2025, I today oppose it on the grounds that it unnecessarily duplicates existing structures, regulations and programs already functioning within Victoria regarding swim safety. Firstly, the bill proposes the creation of the Victorian Swim and Water Safety Board. But let us not forget that numerous organisations like Life Saving Victoria and the Royal Life Saving Society already operate effectively across both education and regulation, with meaningful statistics backing up the programs' validity. They deliver nationally accredited instructor training already, promote swim safety campaigns and support inclusive water education. Do we really need another board to do what is already being done? Secondly, the bill refers to a requirement for adequate training for swim instructors across the private and public sectors. Yet all swim instructors in Victoria are already mandated to hold Austswim or equivalent national qualifications to ensure instructors are properly trained. These programs are rigorous and already nationally recognised and enforced by employers and councils alike. Duplicating these standards will only confuse regulation, burden swim schools and remove funds from real community impact. Instead of creating new, unnecessary systems, we should instead put our focus on funding and reinforcing programs that already work and not spend Victorian taxpayer dollars on mending something that is not broken.

Friday NUNEZA: When implementing this bill, it is vital that everyone is aware of what these swimming regulations will entail and provide access to Victorians of resources that promote swim safety. Starting with subclause 8.1, this addresses how Victorians can be made aware of these measures to increase swim safety, utilising a plethora of measures to promote them in leisure centres and swimming areas. Providing leisure centres with the resources to inform Victorian citizens about the new swim safety measures can help them by not just notifying them about the new regulations but also spreading the word on how we can keep everyone safe. Along with subclause 8.2, it highlights how all Victorian stores selling swimwear will have to provide information about the swimwear rating system, explaining how the swimwear rating is placed to indicate the type of swimwear that can be safe to wear and how it is reflected through its different features and does not dictate what swimwear they should use or not. Lastly, VSWSB would provide information about what they do and their purpose through different resources, including but not limited to physical media and online resources, including the VSWSB website. Through the different methods of reaching Victorians, this can help spread the message of staying safe within our Victorian waters and inform individuals how we can prevent these potential hazards from affecting our loved ones. Through these features, the bill aims to not only help inform Victorians about the regulations but also about its purpose and our mission to keep our citizens safe in the water.

Yuwaluxshayan KANNAN: Before I begin my speech, I would like to rebut some of the points made by the government. They keep talking about swimwear visibility. However, this is not as much of an issue in Australia. It is more about the lack of supervision when people do go swimming. They keep bringing up this rating system, a rating system that might be beneficial, but other than hurting businesses, what is this rating system based on? Is it just going to be based on colour – how bright the swimwear is? Do we not have eyes that we can use just to see brighter colours? Wouldn't a more effective way be to force businesses to create colourful, bright swimwear in general? So far we have talked about the board, the training and the swimwear. But let us bring it back to the issue at hand: drowning. Statistically, most drownings, especially among teenagers and young adults, occur due to risky behaviour such as swimming alone, alcohol use or lack of supervision, not insufficient instructor qualities or dark swimwear. In Victoria over 20 per cent of drowning deaths occur due to alcohol consumption. If alcohol and drugs, among other risky behaviour, are the root causes of most drownings, why are we focusing on teacher qualifications or high-vis clothing when these two factors are not even present when most drowning deaths occur? The government have nitpicked their own reasons in an attempt to hurt businesses and workers. Instead of establishing a questionably structured board, we should focus on funding free life jackets or education against intoxicated swimming, which will yield much better results than whatever nonsense the government is spewing. With the lack of correlation between the root causes of drowning and the shenanigans of the government, it is obvious that they have not understood their own issue because otherwise they would focus on the root causes and actually improve Victoria instead of harming it.

Miranda ZALUNARDO: Can I just draw attention to something that has been overlooked by the opposition, but I think is one of the most powerful parts of this bill. It is not just about preventing drownings; it is about who we include in safety. Clause 6.1(c) requires all swim instructors to be trained in teaching children with disabilities. That might sound small in the scheme of the bill, but it is actually huge, because for too long water safety has been designed for the average child, the able-bodied child, while children with disabilities have been left behind. This bill recognises that equity is not just a value. It is a skill set, and for the first time it is being made mandatory. I think that is the kind of leadership we should be proud to support – because this bill is not just protecting lives; it is expanding who gets to feel safe in the water in the first place.

Devna KARTHIGEYAN: Since the government has clearly overlooked an obvious issue, I would like to take a moment to remind them that the teacher shortage is something very real at the moment. Swim instructors are no exception. How does the government plan to deal with this significantly large problem that jeopardises this entire bill?

Maryam NASIM: The opposition stipulates that stores will be at a detriment with the tagging process. However, this is untrue as the board organises the tagging at no loss to the store. Furthermore, this tagging promotes swim safety literacy on a larger scale, helping tourists, worried parents and guardians regarding the practicality of patterns and colours rather than the aesthetics. Furthermore, particular swimwear actually promotes visibility rather than hinders children in the water.

Maddison GOODCHILD: The government states that parents and others will be looking out for their child within those 20 seconds of drowning, but shouldn't the parent be with them? If the parent is not within reach, is not looking out for that child, who else is meant to? Yes, we have lifesavers – yes, we have them – but your parent is also meant to be with you in these situations.

Helal BEIROUTI: I fail to see how a bill that targets minimising injury and potential deaths in Australia can have any outstanding effect. The bill is structured in a way that is clear and strong on increasing swim safety in Victoria. It saddens me to imagine getting injured participating in my favourite sport, racing a friend to get to the other side of a designated spot just to be pushed down under a strangely placed rock – unfortunately, I can relate to that. This bill sheds light on decreasing injuries and death rates in Victoria. That is a priority, isn't it? So let us make it a reality. I mean, come on. Revealing a statistic that shows under 100 deaths are related to swimming – the way I see it, that is many parents, siblings and children gone, affecting the mental health of millions of people.

Bodhi COLLINS: I appreciate this bill and understand that it comes from a good place in how it seeks to reduce the amount of drownings in Victoria. However, this bill does not approach this reduction in the right way or the appropriate way. What is most concerning and highly problematic is how the swim safety scale rating is created, which is specified in clause 5. Creating a safety score for swimwear by considering characteristics such as colour, pattern, fabric, weight and sun safety to derive a score is like comparing apples to oranges and expecting to create lemonade from that – you cannot do it. A suggestion to reform this is to have multiple scales so that these different characteristics are not compared against each other when they would be getting the same score. What is also most concerning in this bill is that this bill accepts unsafe swimwear. Unsafe swimwear would have a warning sign on it, but unsafe swimwear should not be sold. Unsafe swimwear is going to put Victorians at risk and potentially increase drownings in this state. We do not let car dealers sell unsafe cars, because that would contribute to car deaths. Why should we let swimwear sellers sell unsafe products and not have a warning sign? This is not good enough. When people drown because of this, this will be because of this bill. This bill is highly problematic, and that is why the government and members of the opposition should not support it.

Gabriel Di FALCO: We all know extremely well that our oceans, our rivers and our bays are an integral part of not only Victoria's but Australia's culture as a whole. Swimming, surfing, sailing and fishing are some of the many aquatic activities that serve as the key passions of many Victorians' and Australians' lives, and our ability to offer such opportunities to both residents and visitors alike sets us apart from many cities and regions around the world. As youth parliamentarians representing all corners of Victoria, shouldn't we aspire to share this rare and special nature of our waterways that we treasure every day? As the government we are standing up to the responsibility of sharing the knowledge and the understanding of our water with those both at home and abroad. If we dismiss this bill, who knows how many people, both young and even old, will lose their lives or have their lives forever changed? Do the opposition really want that on their conscience? I urge the opposition to work with us and open their eyes to not just the short term but the long-term security that the board will provide for all Victorians and our visitors. The board's work will foster research and regulations that are forever evolving and adapting in order to keep every single person who steps foot into our water safe, because it is our responsibility that we correct our past failures and mistakes and show the learnings and awareness that have developed over thousands of years of interacting with water so that not one more person is put into harm's way on our watch in our water.

Declan DAVIDSON: I would first like to highlight that I support the idea of this bill. Even one life lost is too many in an unsafe marine environment. I would, however, like to ask the government what effective solutions this bill will actually bring. The three things that the government does not double up on in this bill include a rating system for items of clothing, an app that highlights several numbers rather than 000 and, most negligently, a board of 12 with two swimming teachers – take note: teachers – not life-saving specialised lifeguards. Imagine a child is drowning. We have 20 seconds to save them. As lifesavers we still have 20 seconds, parents or not. Any lifeguard that is trained under current standards will notice a child drowning. What has the board actually done to help this? They have made lifesaving more complicated. I applaud the government for their attempts to make Victoria a better place, but there is much more work that needs to be done on this bill.

Matilda FEEHAN: It is completely naive of the opposition to say that private swimming instructors are fully competent to teach, when they do not require any qualifications to teach swimming lessons. How can you possibly expect children to be properly educated on different bodies of water and their dangers when an instructor might have never swum outside of a pool? While drownings are not purely related to the swimming teacher, shall we not look for the direct cause of tragedies which occur in our Australian waters – education? If teachers are not educated, how can we expect future generations to understand different bodies of water?

Matilda SOWTER: This bill mentions features for an app regarding remote areas of Victoria. Me, I am from one, but will the app work offline? What happens when there is no cell service, wi-fi et cetera? This bill instates false hopes in an app that leaves good Victorians as victims in a totally avoidable situation. To rely so heavily on an app as a way to find help not only lacks sense but is dangerous. This app could lead to the deaths of so, so many, and why hasn't the government considered that? Also, what if the app has a bug? What if it has a virus? What if it is hacked? How does that work? How will the app save lives when really it is denying our chance at living? And one last point: how does it download? Does it download in the app? A download in an app can be hacked. It can be filled with viruses. Will it be a file? What sort of file? Will it be accessible on a phone or any type of device?

Kris van der KAMP: The opposition questions where children's parents are when they are supposed to be watching their children. The government cannot control the parents of these children. We do not know where the parents are, but other people, other parents, lifeguards and onlookers will have a much easier time realising a child is in danger if they are wearing visible swimwear. The opposition says that a well-trained lifeguard will save the child in 20 seconds, but haven't the deaths that have already happened proven that is not always the case? Some swimwear actively hinders attempts at saving lives because of a lack of visibility. By encouraging people to buy safer swimwear, by putting ratings on clothes, people will be more likely to see that there is a safety rating and therefore buy the clothing. By giving this encouragement, people will buy safer swimwear, and it will make it safer for children to swim.

Maithili LAL: I would like the government to acknowledge the extensive expenses required to implement this bill, such as the multiple lesson costs, prices for getting qualified and the wages of the qualified instructors. Is this really justified to spend on a bill that accomplishes an already existing facility?

Tilly STECHER: The opposition has mentioned that the clauses are unrelated. To the contrary, the clauses contained within the bill all support the underlying aim of increasing swim safety, such is the nature of a bill. Rather than being lazy and disorganised, this bill is thorough and covers a wide range of considerations. The fact that there are so many areas within current swim safety regulations that need to be improved is a testament to how unsafe the system currently is and further reinforces why this bill is an absolute necessity for Victorians.

Kenzie DAWBER: This bill is biased. The government's first speaker has claimed to be a former swim teacher. Her individual experience is no unbiased proof of teachers' relevance to drowning. Why and how can she speak on behalf of all swim teachers, when they have their own experiences? The opposition is also making the bill irrelevant to itself, as it keeps talking about teacher qualifications rather than water safety itself. Water safety does not just revolve around teacher qualifications.

Layla KTAIFAN: Building on a previous point mentioned, the opposition has stated that parents are the ones who are supposed to supervise their children while swimming. However, what happens when parents do not know how to swim themselves? This is exactly why we need lifeguards and the various forms of swim safety promotion mentioned in the bill. We need to break the cycle of low swimming literacy that spans across past generations, especially in immigrant, migrant and marginalised communities. This particular argument presented by the opposition is not inclusive or well thought out, a reflection of the opposition's stance.

Sandy GANESH: The bill outlines several guidelines but does not tell us what happens if they are not followed. How does the government plan to prevent harm and enforce its rules without any consequences? This bill is well intentioned, aiming to ensure safety in swimming areas, but ultimately it fails to reach this goal.

Ammar MAHMOUD: The opposition have raised their concern that extra training for all instructors is unnecessary. I believe that many instructors already have enough qualifications, but I ask: what harm will further training cause? Come to think of it, it is really beneficial for parents and swim instructors, as it allows for parents to have peace of mind, knowing that their children are under supervision that is up to national standards. Simultaneously it enriches swimming instructors' expertise, exposing them to a greater number of employment opportunities and further increasing employability. The safety of our loved ones is indispensable. It is something that we should not gamble with. This bill takes a great step forward in making sure we keep our communities water-safe. The opposition can take this gamble out of stubbornness, but I say it is better to be safe than sorry.

Ash CRAWFORD: Just circling back to the app under clause 7, specifically 7.2, talking about how the app will allow for community members to report incidents, how are we sure that we can trust community to report? How are we sure that our community is trained to be able to identify rips or other dangerous objects in the water in a trustworthy manner that should be sent out to other community members?

Atena KASHANI: I want to ask the opposition this: would you personally feel safe if your children, if your nieces, if your nephews were out swimming in pools without proper trained teachers? Would you feel safe knowing that they are swimming with coaches with no relevant teaching experience? In addition, what about adults who do not know how to swim? How would private teachers know how to save them and teach them? In addition to this, when it comes to swimwear, swimwear is already being sold. We do not limit freedom of expression when it comes to clothing, and I ask the opposition to read the bill.

Patrick HENDERSON: The colour of swimwear is a minuscule and almost completely irrelevant factor in determining drowning deaths. I cannot be the only one who sees how absurd that is to focus on that particular factor when others, such as swimming proficiency, toxicology and supervision, are barely mentioned, if at all, in this legislation, when they are so much more important in determining whether someone will drown or not in a dangerous situation around water. I mean, why not just establish a safety scale for hair dye or nail polish to encourage swimmers to have brightly coloured hair when they are swimming? It would have the same effect.

Madina HAKIMI: The opposition call training for swim teachers unnecessary, but just because their experience with swim teachers has been positive does not mean all experiences are. It is important to have a standard so that nothing is allowed to slip through the cart. The opposition claims we are demonising swim teachers who are passionate about their jobs, but passion does not save lives – in fact it could lead to a loss of lives. The opposition says we are duplicating measures because swim teachers are already required to have qualifications, but this is only time for public swim teachers, not private swim teachers.

Charlie CLARKE: I request that those opposite review their utterly preposterous bill. Are we really to believe that a simple clothing tag containing only price, size and sometimes SPF is to be benefited through overcomplication, through inserting a non-universal rating system? A tag as hard to read as an ingredient list – that is not safer. The only simple thing about this bill is that it is simply unfathomable. Additionally, I ask why parents are letting their children swim in water that they themselves cannot even stand in. The whole premise of this bill is unacceptable for the people of Victoria.

Nissa CAMPBELL WALKER: I would like to note that the opposition's main concern is the cost of the new swimwear proposed, but I would like to mention that the tags that they are proposing to add to this swimwear will not actually cost any more. One thing to ask is when did we, as people, decide that our children's lives were not worth an extra dollar or an extra \$2? We need to focus more on our children's safety, rather than on the \$2 coin that you can send spend elsewhere.

Alison VONG: Toxicology may be a factor. However, it is not a main cause of swimming accidents. However, a factor such as lack of education is a main one.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Evan Mulholland): I call on the sponsor of the bill.

Shanay GAO-KUHLMANN: Parents are negligent. We cannot do anything to stop this, but we can do things to make death just slightly more preventable when accidents do occur, which are presented in this bill. We cannot prevent the irresponsibility of those around the water, but we can do what we can to educate consumers in ways that they can remain safe. The opposition stated that swimwear is not that much of an issue. It shows me the true lack of concern the opposition holds for our youth. Any help is help, and all of these factors interrelate. There is not one distinct factor for drowning as there are many mixing together, causing a terrible accident. As for the board members, they mentioned that having a youth member is strange, but the youth voice is important and saying otherwise is simply discriminatory. Likewise, stipulating the opinion of non swim teachers or non swim professionals is similarly discriminatory, as their voices still matter and matter even more so in this field because so many different water-based experiences can come together to really protect our youth, our elderly, anyone vulnerable in the water and any citizen in general. Likewise, unsafe swimwear is not like a malfunctioning car. It is ultimately still a choice because we will not dictate what our citizens can and cannot wear. Similarly, the app is used to educate. It is not a 000; it shows resources but is not a lifeline. It is used so that if you know you are going to a place, you can check: is there a dangerous animal there? And with the self-reporting feature, of course we may not be able to trust anyone, but some information is better than going in there blindly. Consequences as well were mentioned. However, the only consequence we see is just not being able to teach if you do not have the correct certification. All our other clauses have nothing that would require consequences. We are not giving you a consequence for wearing the wrong swimwear.

The ACTING PRESIDENT: The question is:

That the Increased Swim Safety Bill 2025 be now read a second and a third time.

House divided on motion:

Ayes	28
Noes	20
Majority in favour	8

Motion agreed to.

Read second time.

Read third time.

The ACTING PRESIDENT: Well done, everyone. That was a really informative debate. My name is Evan Mulholland. I am the Liberal member for the Northern Metropolitan Region. I also serve as Deputy Leader of the Opposition in the Legislative Council, which I think is the most beautiful chamber in the whole of Australia. It is a delight to have you all in here. It is quite inspiring to hear the different sides to the debate. I know that when you are arguing over small bills, it can seem quite pedantic, the little bits and pieces that you are all pointing out, but I think it is all a valuable contribution. That is exactly what this chamber is for. This chamber is a house of review, and as a member of the opposition I have argued over the tiniest pieces of amendments for half an hour at a time and until 4 in the morning in what is called our committees, but it is so important that we get laws right and that we have the democratic mechanisms by which to do that. So in terms of passing legislation, those go into laws that affect people's everyday lives, from swimming – and swimming between the flags – to traffic management to domestic violence to policing to hospitals and schools, things that matter a lot to everyday Victorians. I am quite inspired being here as a youngish MP. I got elected at 33 years old. I am now 36, and it is inspiring for me to see so many young leaders coming through, and something that you might be interested in after your contributions today and this week is politics. Do not consider that it cannot be done. It can. Get involved in the democratic process. Get involved in your civic society organisations. Prior to entering Parliament I used to run a youth theatre company in Melbourne's northern suburbs which supports young people into the performing arts through choirs and musicals and plays and things like that. I did have some experience at least in youth organisation and engagement and am keen to now, as the Shadow Minister for Arts, see young people supported in particular through grassroots community involvement. Thank you again for coming in today and this week. This has been a great process, and I would like to thank both the YMCA Youth Parliament and its leaders but also the staff here at the Parliament who have helped with this process.

Sitting suspended 2:14 pm until 2:35 pm.

Provisional License and Learners Permit Reform Bill 2025

Sponsor: John Fawkner College

Refuter: The Huddle

Introduction and first reading

Hamayle ASMAT: I move:

That I have leave to introduce a bill titled Provisional License and Learner Permits Reform Bill 2025.

Motion agreed to.

Read first time.

Second reading

Hamayle ASMAT: I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

I rise today as the sponsor of the Provisional License and Learners Permit Reform Bill 2025, a bill for an act to create fairer, safer and more accessible pathways to independent transport for young Victorians. This bill seeks to reduce the age of the provisional licence in Victoria from 18 years old to 17 years old. The purpose of the bill is to increase young people's access to education, employment and support services and social and cultural life, as mentioned in the bill. Our future depends on the opportunities we provide to the next generation, and this bill is a step in the right direction. The bill maintains the existing requirement for learner drivers to complete a minimum of 120 hours of supervised driving under the guidance of a fully licensed driver. In addition the bill introduces a mandatory mental capacity assessment to ensure that individuals possess the necessary maturity and decision-making ability to operate a vehicle responsibly in a multitude of conditions, including hazards and harsh weather. The assessment modules will be designed to reflect real-life scenarios, providing a more comprehensive evaluation of a learner driver's readiness to progress and acquire a provisional licence.

This bill recognises that many young people, particularly in regional and rural areas, rely on access to public transportation. However, the current public transportation system often fails to operate punctually, causing inconvenience for these young opportunity-seekers, which often results in young people missing essential commitments such as work, educational activities or community events. This bill also introduces stricter tracking requirements within the myLearners application to ensure accurate recording of supervision during driving hours. Under this provision all users must consent to location data being recorded upon activation of the app. To maintain data integrity, users are prohibited from employing virtual private networks – VPNs – proxy servers, jailbreaking devices or device emulators while using the app. All data collected by the application will be secure, maintained by the Department of Transport, DOT. Access to this data will be restricted, though it may be shared with other government departments where required for legitimate purposes. In the event of a data breach, affected users will be notified immediately. Users who do not accept these terms must manually log their supervised driving hours, with verification provided by a fully licensed driver or instructor. Additional rules apply for users who breach these requirements.

As a young person myself I have spoken with countless students who find it difficult to juggle school, part-time jobs and long, unreliable public transport routes, who spend hours a day commuting to their after-school jobs. These real-life challenges are what inspired this bill. By passing this bill we send a clear message that we trust our youth. We are investing in their future. Let us give them the tools they need to succeed safely, responsibly, and independently. We aim to improve mobility and opportunities for these young Victorians while maintaining our strong safety standards.

Charlie CLARKE: We on this side of the chamber oppose the bill in its current form. While we acknowledge the government's intent to improve access to transport for young people, this bill is riddled with poor legislative construction and undefined terms, not to mention a myriad of unworkable proposals. What the government fails to consider is that the real-world impact of reducing the licensing age comes with a need to address broader safety, educational and socio-economic concerns. 17-year-olds have a statistically higher crash rate than 18-year-olds. The government's proposal ignores this data and lowers the licensing age without offering increased training or oversight.

Furthermore, the current L2P system is already inadequate. The bill's suggestion of 'realistic scenarios' lacks any guidance for assessment or integration into the curriculum. On top of these fatal flaws the changes to the myLearners app represent a significant invasion of privacy. The phrase 'legitimate reasons' for sharing data across government departments is dangerously vague and unacceptable. Additionally, clause 8 is perhaps the most flawed. The government introduces psychological screening without defining its standards, enforcement mechanisms or appeals processes. It risks discrimination against neurodiverse youth and misunderstands what constitutes driving ability. Simultaneously, lowering the legal driving age does not reduce financial barriers. The bill assumes access equals equity, but it ignores the fuel, registration, insurance and vehicle costs which make driving inaccessible for many 17-year-olds.

Finally, within this bill is a lack of legislative clarity. Critical terms such as 'mental capacity', 'realistic scenarios' and 'legitimate reasons' are undefined. The government clearly lacks the attention to detail required for responsible lawmaking. Overall this bill creates more questions than answers. It overreaches, overcomplicates and underdelivers. We on this side of the chamber call on members to reject this bill in its current state. Young Victorians deserve a fair, safe and clearly defined licensing system, not rushed legislation and untested schemes.

Gabriel Di FALCO: Driving requires practice; there is no denying that. It is a simple fact that we all have learned or will come to learn firsthand, and it is this fact that is the very essence of this bill. Through this bill we the government aspire to provide more young people with the opportunity to drive earlier and more frequently by lowering the minimum age for a provisional licence to 17 years. It is why clause 6 is so crucial. The learner driver experience is designed to prepare young drivers with the necessary familiarity and experience that is essential for driving safely on Victorian roads. If we maintain the 120-hour learner driver requirement as outlined in clause 6, what logic is there to rationalise preventing 17-year-olds from sitting their driving test? Driving experience does not depend on when your birthday is; it comes from the immersion into real scenarios which is provided by those 120 hours of learner driver experience, with the repetition and familiarity that solidify the basics of driving. It is frankly nonsensical to suggest that 17-year-olds who have completed the prescribed hours have to wait months to sit a test that they are more than prepared for. Driving is all about experience, and by lowering of minimum age for P-plates whilst still upholding the 120-hour requirement we are enabling young Victorians to get on the road as soon as they are ready, not as soon as they are 18, so they can experience the delight of that first unaccompanied drive without the agonising wait for an 18th birthday.

Nuradin MOHAMMED: Our team is firmly against this bill because of one key issue: safety. The statistics do not lie. P-platers are the most at-risk drivers on the road. According to the TAC, young drivers aged 18 to 25 make up only 13 per cent of drivers on the road but account for over 20 per cent of all road fatalities. Crash risk is three times higher in the first year of driving on P-plates than at any other time in your life. Now imagine reducing the P-plate age to 17. You would be introducing a whole new group of drivers into that high-risk category – drivers with even less emotional maturity and often less driving practice than 18-year-olds. Let me give you an example. In 2022 a VicRoads study showed that drivers who had an extra six months of supervised practice were 40 per cent less likely to be involved in a crash during their first year on their P-plates. That extra time matters. It builds judgement, patience and awareness. Think about the real-world consequences. Giving a 17-year-old a licence does not just affect them, it affects their passengers and pedestrians, cyclists and everyone else sharing the road. Yes, it might seem convenient to give licences earlier, but convenience should never come before safety. Young people need more time to learn, not less. That is why we strongly oppose this bill.

Ammar MAHMOUD: The opposition might say public transport is a better solution, but that only works if it actually exists, and for many people across Victoria it does not. Young people from outer suburbs or regional areas know the truth: buses come once an hour and trains stop running early, and in some places there is nothing at all. So let us not pretend public transport is a real option for everyone. Yes, improving public transport is important, but that is not what our bill addresses. It is about giving young people the means to move safely, independently and on time. Public transport might work on paper, but it does not work in real life when you are starting a 6 am shift or finishing a job at 10 pm. Simply put, it is inconvenient. Imagine being a 17-year-old finishing late and waiting alone in the dark for a bus that may or may not come or walking home in the rain with no other option. How is that safe? How is that fair? This bill makes it possible for young people to get where they need to go – to jobs, to TAFE, to crucial training. Not every family can afford to drive their teenager around, and not every parent has the time. So if young people are willing to step up to work and to contribute, why should we stand in their way? Let us be honest, public transport will never cover the entire state in a way that works for everyone. But mobility should not depend on your postcode. It should not be a privilege. Other states already allow 17-year-olds to get their provisional licence. Why should Victoria be the one that says no? This is about safety. This is about opportunity. This is about trust. Right now we are the ones being asked to make that call. Let us get it right once and for all.

Ash CRAWFORD: We believe that the mental capacity test introduced in clause 8 of the bill is not a thorough indicator of driving ability. Maturity is not everything when behind the wheel of a car. Testing responses to accidents and hazards is only one of the many requirements for drivers on our roads to keep us safe. We acknowledge that the knowledge listed is useful and necessary, but the bill overlooks reaction times and attitudes towards other drivers on our roads in Victoria. We also believe that more voices are necessary in developing the test. Young people should be involved in its development alongside the mental health professionals and employees of the department of transport. This test also runs the risk of disadvantaging large groups of people by only acknowledging the maturity of some, not all. Maturity and driving ability can come in so many different forms and will look different for everyone throughout all walks of life. We urge the sponsoring team to reassess this clause.

Adongluge FADIET: Today I would like to talk about a concept that could easily reshape the way we think about young drivers and road safety. The idea is simple but powerful: young people should take a maturity test before going for their drivers test. Now, you might be wondering why. Isn't passing a written and driving test already enough? But let us take a closer look at what it really means to be behind the wheel. Driving is not just a physical skill; it is a mental and emotional responsibility. It is about making split-second decisions that can not only affect their life but the lives of passengers, pedestrians and other drivers. That is where maturity comes into play. First, let us talk about emotional control. Teenagers by nature are still developing emotionally. They may know how to steer, brake and signal, but can they stay calm in a stressful situation? Can they resist peer pressure to speed or show off? A maturity test can assess that, because being skilled at driving is not just about how you handle a car, it is about how you handle yourself. Second, the statistics are hard to ignore. According to the CDC, teen drivers are three times more likely to get into fatal crashes than drivers over 20. That is not just bad luck. That result is due to poor judgement, impulsive questioning or distractions. A maturity test can help identify risk factors before a young person gets behind the wheel. Third, driving is a moral responsibility: you are in charge of a vehicle that can cause real harm if used recklessly. So shouldn't we be asking if a person is ready not just legally but emotionally and mentally? A maturity test can open doors and personalise training, delaying licensing for those who need more time. Finally, and most importantly, it is about shifting the focus from 'Are they old enough?' to 'Are they ready?'

Matilda SOWTER: We as the opposition believe that this bill places too much trust in the learner permit test. The VicRoads learner permit test consists of only 32 questions and can be answered online on a computer. What actually prevents cheating through this method of testing? If this bill were to be passed, it would allow children to drive solo on our roads. Keep in mind that these children only have a year or less of driving experience and a minimum of 25 correct questions on this test. Why would we rely so heavily on something that can be so easily cheated on? Has the government actually thought this through? Of course they have not. Even with the required hours remaining the same, how can a driver be fully prepared with only a year's experience of supervised driving? They have only experienced seasonal and weather changes once. Think about storms, fog or high winds – how is a child supposed to manage to drive through them? Have you even thought about the dangers not only to other L-platers but also to P-platers and families? Do you want the deaths of hundreds, maybe thousands, on your hands? Also, the allure of getting a licence sooner could lead to false reporting in logbooks. Should that kind of person be a driver? Should they be a solo driver at such a young age? I think not. This bill, however, is a good one, and it could be passed if the correct changes were implemented.

Maryam NASIM: Today I rise to speak not merely of lowering the driving age, but the profound responsibility that must accompany this change and the safeguards we will put in place to uphold it. At the very heart of this proposal is a mandatory safety and ethics education module, a program designed to do more than teach road rules. Its purpose is to instil every young driver with an unshakeable respect for human life, a deep understanding of their responsibility to others, and the moral seriousness of every choice they make behind the wheel. This is not a bureaucratic formality. It is a commitment to shaping drivers who recognise that driving is never just about reaching the destination. It is about the countless lives that share the journey. But we do not stop there. We will maintain a rigorous supervising driver requirement, ensuring that these young drivers are not left to navigate the roads alone. They will be guided, mentored and supported fully by licensed adults who share not only practical skills but also judgement and caution that come from the very experience. These safeguards are not obstacles. They are the very backbone of responsible reform. They ensure that by lowering the age of eligibility we are not lowering our expectations; in fact we are raising them. Ask yourselves: what kind of drivers do we want on Victorian roads – ones who simply know how to steer and signal, or those who drive with an ingrained sense of caution, care, and ethical responsibility? This is not just a policy of earlier access, it is a policy grounded in accountability and respect. By embedding safety and ethics at the start of a young person's driving journey, we are preparing a generation who will not only know how to drive but choose to drive responsibly. In doing so, we keep Victorian roads safer for every family, every commuter and every community, and that is a goal worthy of our support.

Crystal COMPTON-ROBINS: This bill seeks to make life easier for young Victorians, and I commend that intention. But clause 9 in particular does not serve that goal. In fact it risks doing the opposite. Clause 9 demands that all learner drivers agree to location tracking through the myLearners app, a requirement that disproportionately targets young people and low-income families simply to prevent a small number from what, cheating logbook hours? Let us be clear, this is a heavy-handed solution to a minor problem. There is no clear evidence that location tracking will make roads safer or learning more effective, but there is plenty of evidence that constant GPS use drains battery, uses data and incurs real financial costs, especially for low-income families and rural communities. If a learner uses a VPN without realising it, their hours can be wiped. That is not educational, that is punitive. More alarmingly, clause 9 states that all data shall be open to other government departments if needed for legitimate reasons. What constitutes a legitimate reason, and who decides? In a climate where many racialised, queer, trans and disabled young people already face systemic bias, how can we trust this data not to be misused? And if a child's data is compromised, the clause says they will be notified and that is it – no protections, no safeguards, no accountability. For a bill that claims to support young people, that is a dangerous oversight. This Parliament must ask: are we really protecting young people by enacting a bill that sets such a troubling precedent? I oppose it, and I urge the house to do the same.

Helal BEIROUTI: I ask everyone here today to simply trust the youth. We understand that people are worried that 17-year-olds may not be mature and trustworthy enough to be driving on the roads. Although, just as one would say, ‘What’s the difference between a 17-year-old and a 16-year-old?’ I say, ‘What is the difference between a 17-year-old and an 18-year-old?’ As the world develops, the younger generation becomes smarter, with the drive to become great, although unfortunately the most unnecessary barricade of transport interferes. Let us be able to go to a meeting filled with youth leaders such as us without needing to worry about finding a ride, searching for hours, slammed with excuse after excuse on why we cannot be dropped off to a building a few minutes away. This bill builds a foundation on any worry or excuse thrown at us on why a 17-year-old should not be able to get their provisional licence early. Not mature enough? Say hello to the maturity test. Faking hours? Say hello to increased tracking stringency in the myLearners app. Not enough experience? Do not worry, we left it at 120 hours. Even the definition was changed to show how importantly and seriously we care for the safety and legal procedure of one’s driving. So what is the excuse? Why not change the age that young people can get their P-plates to the same age that every state other than Victoria has it? The only real reason I can think of is that the youth are not trusted, and to that I say: wake up. We are stronger, not just physically but mentally. Let the youth be able to move around as they wish. Let them get to their job sites and their schools on time. I mean, we are allowed to drop out in year 10 and we are allowed to start working at 15. So why not let us transition into our real lives with the introduction of the Provisional License and Learners Permit Reform Bill 2025?

Hamza MOHAMMED: Following my colleague’s strong points, I want to highlight an important but often ignored aspect of this proposed bill: the large financial burden it places on 17-year-olds and their families. Let us be clear: the cost of maintaining a car in Australia is already very high. We are talking about registration, insurance, fuel, maintenance and of course the initial purchase price of the vehicle. These are not minor expenses, they are significant ongoing financial commitments. For many families, especially those who are already struggling, adding another driver to the household, especially one so young, is simply not practical. Lowering the licensing age by a year means expecting 17-year-olds, many of whom are still in high school or just starting part-time work, must somehow take on this heavy financial responsibility. It is an unreasonable expectation. Many parents will feel the pressure to cover these costs, adding to their existing financial burdens. This is not just about pocket money, it could mean hundreds if not thousands of dollars each year. For 17-year-olds who do try to handle these costs themselves, it often means working more hours, which can hurt their studies or mental health. Their main focus should be on education and personal growth, not on the heavy financial burden of car ownership. While the desire for early independence is understandable, we must recognise that driving is not just a convenience, it is a costly privilege. By lowering the licensing age without providing support or significantly decreasing vehicle ownership costs, we are placing an unfair and heavy burden on our young people and their families. We should look for ways to reduce financial pressures on young Australians, not increase them. I urge all members to consider the real economic impact this bill will have on our communities.

Atena KASHANI: The opposition states that this bill reduces the age without increasing training. I want to ask you: on top of the 120 hours that are mandatory, would young people not gain further skills and practice from driving alone? Let me remind you all that New South Wales already has implemented legislation to allow 17-year-olds to gain their Ps. Why are Victorians so opposed to this idea? Why are we not allowing young people to become independent, gain their confidence on the roads and contribute to their communities? Absolutely, I agree with the statements and the statistics that P-platers are at the highest risk of crashing. The facts simply do not lie. But what about the young people that are responsible, that have those skills, that want to go to school and that need to go to work after? What about them? We have tried for years to fix the public transport system, yet here we are. Do you want to be responsible for young people showing up late to work? It is not enough to just say that young people should not be trusted to have their Ps earlier. Speaking from experience, I have had to wait 40 minutes in the rain for a bus to show up, and it never did. If they are responsible enough to get a job, they should be able to drive. The opposition is doing what it does best: categorising people into categories and stereotyping them – typical. If learners can be trusted, then we can have a better community. People can be trusted. Let them thrive.

Kenzie DAWBER: Whilst I acknowledge the good in this bill, I must say the government needs to consider the timeframe. How are learners supposed to get all 120 hours in the timeframe of a year? Yes, some children may be able to get all 120 hours, but you must consider those who cannot. Some children's parents work full time and do not have time to take their child out driving. Some children have parents or a parent who refuse to let their kid drive. How are these children expected to get their provisional licence within a year? How does the government really expect children to get all the hours in one year? Families are busy and do not have time to go for drives always. Some families may not even have a car, so how are those children meant to drive at all?

Hayden DIGBY: The opposition previously made the bold claim that people cannot learn to drive in just one year. Are they aware that you can get your learners at 18 and have your licence the year after?

Devna KARTHIGEYAN: The fact that the government imagines that 17-year-olds can manage associated insurance costs such as accident cover, for instance, is plain ridiculous. Most 17-year-olds are in no way financially capable of covering such insurance costs, because we do not live in the fantasy version of Victoria, where a cost-of-living crisis and a lack of job placements for under-18s are not issues that plague us, contrary to what the government obviously seems to believe. Under the guise of providing 17-year-olds with education and opportunities regarding driving and road loss, the government is simply bestowing more unmanageable burdens upon young people.

Imogen O'SHANNESY: The opposition claims that 17-year-olds are not fit to drive but fails to remember that New South Wales has already set the age to get a provisional licence at 17 and neglects the fact that Victoria is the only state that still has the age at 18, as previously mentioned by multiple other members on this side of the house. I ask the opposition: are Victorian 17-year-olds somehow less capable of driving on their own than those in other parts of the country? Additionally, the opposition claims that the myLearners app tracking location and other details of users are an invasion of privacy. However, they are choosing to forget that this information is already accessible to those that they say should not have it, and the myLearners app already tracks information. The point of this clause is only to increase these services to protect the safety of young drivers, not to hinder them.

Bodhi COLLINS: This bill is pretty good at a first glance, but when you get into the nitty-gritty aspects of it, again we find that it becomes evident that not only does this bill lack a meaningful purpose but it lacks common sense. At 16 you get your Ls. At 17, under this bill, you will get your P-plates. In one year, 52 weeks, you are expected to drive 120 hours. Simple math will tell you that that is more than 2 hours a week. Come on, who can do that? Not only this, but it is near impossible for many. It encourages – it condones – people to create a sense of competition. We all do that. We all tell our friends, 'Oh, how many hours do you have?' We encourage this sense of competition. This encourages people to drive when they are fatigued. People will rush to get their hours done. The government here is watering down safety measures. We the opposition are for safety. The government is for danger. Why should the government remove these safety measures when they are meaningful, when they are protecting the lives of innocent Victorians who are in the cars or the pedestrians and other people around them? The minimum age that we have for P-platers is appropriate, especially considering that they are statistically most likely to be involved in a dangerous crash, statistically most likely to put others in danger. We must protect the safety of Victorians. We must protect the safety of our friends, of our family and of our neighbours. That is why we must vote against this bill, and I call on the government to do so too if they have any pride.

Matilda FEEHAN: The opposition has failed to deliver an argument that addresses any difference between being 17 years old behind the wheel with a fully licensed driver and an 18-year-old driving by themselves. Just because people will be able to get their probationary licence at 17, it does not mean every 17-year-old is automatically going to get their licence on their birthday. There is no expectation on anyone. How many 18-year-olds do you know that actually have their Ps? Once you have your 120 hours, you have the same amount of experience as an 18-year-old P-plater. Why is it that at 17 years old you get the responsibility of an adult, the expectations of an adult, yet you are still considered a child behind the wheel in the context of driving?

Declan DAVIDSON: I am sorry, but how can we let this bill actually pass? As youth parliamentarians we have a responsibility to advocate for a safer environment for young people and our collective society, do we not? We all know the answer. This bill and this government challenge our own safer environment. The government will shatter the already flimsy standards that VicRoads has for the eligibility of completing all learning requirements. Let us be honest, the government claim that their new standards will give learners the same experience just because they will have completed 120 hours of driving. I am sorry if this is harsh, but the government needs to hear it: this bill endangers children, community and the drivers themselves. This bill is incompetent, this bill is dangerous and this bill is a pure breach of human privacy. Continuing this mental capacity test is poorly thought out. This test will test a person's maturity and awareness as a driver, yes, but it has also been proven over and over and over again that learner drivers are statistically safer drivers when they drive with a fully licensed driver. The government associates maturity demonstrated in a test with actual driving abilities. This test is like any other. It is a measure of how well you perform in front of an administrator.

Friday NUNEZA: What the opposition fail to realise is that they are assuming this is allowing 17-year-olds to drive on our roads just after an online test. However, may I remind them that they would also be required to pass a physical test before being able to drive, denoting how this does not prevent safety but rather ensures that the drivers are able to drive competently and safely.

Taneshia SHAW: The government mentioned them needing a way back from work. A car is not the best solution, due to them now needing to pay for fuel, which in turn means more work. Seventeen-year-olds want to have fun, not to go to work just to pay for fuel just to get to and from work.

Miranda ZALUNARDO: Let us be honest, young Victorians are already getting their P-plates at 17 years old. They are just simply crossing the border to do it. New South Wales already allows provisional licences from 17. We have a situation where young people in Victoria are literally going to New South Wales, getting their P-plates under a different system and then driving back here legally on Victorian roads. What this bill does is close that gap. It stops a workaround from becoming the norm, and it gives young Victorians the same independence as their interstate peers, without the loophole. This is not just about driving earlier, it is about giving rural students a shot at apprenticeships, giving carers flexibility to help with their families and recognising that transport in Victoria does not work the same for everyone. If our neighbouring states can trust 17-year-olds to drive, we can too, especially with the added mental capacity test this bill introduces. So instead of sending young people across the border for the independence they are ready for, let us meet them where they are and bring Victoria back up to speed.

Patrick HENDERSON: Throughout this debate the government has consistently identified that a lack of public transport is responsible for a large portion of these issues, especially in regional and outer suburban areas, yet the government has dismissed these concerns as an impossible problem. Let me tell you the truth: it is not impossible. This bill is a bandaid solution to a serious systemic issue that can only be fixed by one thing: fixing public transport.

Alison VONG: Young people are not required to drive. This bill is for those who need it, not want it.

Maddison GOODCHILD: I would like to bring back up the examples where we got told that you can drop out of school at 16, you can get a job at 16 as well – but you know what you can do only when you are 18? You can vote, drink, gamble, drive with your P-plates and smoke. You know what the difference between these two is? For one of them, the 18-year-olds have a huge impact on not only themselves but others.

Georgia NEICHO: As the opposition just stated, when you turn 18 you can smoke, you can drink, you can gamble and you can drive. What three of those four things have in common is they are all extreme addictions. Drinking is a drug, and gambling and smoking are nationally recognised as two extreme addictions in our country. Why is that now grouped into driving? You have never heard of someone being addicted to driving, have you? The opposition also says lowering the driving age becomes a burden financially. We are not saying that once you turn 17 you have to drive. It is saying now 17-year-olds who have been working for the past two years can drive. Those who need it have the ability to do so.

Maithili LAL: The government argues that the bill seeks to assist 17-year-olds to balance their several responsibilities and that having access to driving will result in efficiency for students. But I would like to ask the government: what is stopping us from reducing the age to 16? Why not 15? Doesn't the same reasoning still hold true? Don't they also juggle with several responsibilities? Don't they also have jobs, go to school and manage studying? I would like to ask: when does this truly senseless age-lowering truly stop?

Layla KTAIFAN: The opposition has pointed out that young drivers have high rates of road accidents. However, this bill does not remove the existing requirement of 120 supervised hours. In fact it adds realistic scenarios to the learners modules, improving preparedness. Victoria is currently the only state that has not lowered the age, yet other states have done so without any significant rise in accidents. With this bill's extra safeguards, our roads will actually become safer, not more dangerous. Additionally, the opposition stated that the mental capacity test is insufficient and should include other factors such as reaction times and how drivers interact with each other on the road, and to that I say: read the bill. Clause 8.2 already mentions that the mental capacity test shall test how a person reacts to certain situations, which both reaction times and interaction with other drivers both fall under. Finally, the argument that there are no measures to prevent cheating on tests and false reporting of logbooks is flawed. This same logic could be applied for 18-year-olds applying for P-plates. There is no relevance for this argument to this bill. Not a lot changes in one year from 17 to 18 years old, except the lack of opportunities provided to 17-year-olds in regard to driving that are often overlooked, and that is what this bill aims to address.

Alex SENIOR: I would like to address the second speaker of the government and also echo the concerns of the chamber. There is a concern that people who are 17 are not able to start driving, but this is an unfair disadvantage to those who are not financially able to start driving. You mentioned that there is a lack of transport, especially in rural areas, and as someone who is rural I myself have experienced these difficulties – especially when working late, it is a hassle getting home. But this is not the solution. We need more provisions within public transport, as this is reliant on people's incomes and not inclusive of all Australians. The federal government has most recently committed to net zero emissions by 2050, and this is a move away from green and clean transport. We need to continue to invest in public transport to provide limited emissions and stick to the commitments that the federal government has made. This is a discriminatory bill without consideration of those without the financial ability to access this, and if there was further investment in public transportation it would not just help young people but would also help the wider community. I would especially like to address that as of next year public transport will be free to everyone under 18, and this will be a great alternative, better for the environment and better for the people of Victoria as it will be less reliant on their financial incomes.

Kris van der KAMP: The opposition insists on referring to 17-year-olds as children, and that is a part of the problem. While 17-year-olds are children, many of them take on the responsibilities of adults – they work, do TAFE, become responsible for assisting in household errands. By insisting on calling 17-year-olds children, you are disrespecting their abilities and mistrusting them. These 17-year-olds still have to experience 120 hours of driving, and the mental capacity test will ensure they are able to deal with these responsibilities. Furthermore, the opposition insists on saying that it is a financial burden on families when 17-year-olds are required to drive, but 17-year-olds are not required to gain their provisional licence. It is an option for people who want to do so, and as is the case now, you can get your provisional licence after you turn 18. The financial disparity between when someone is 17 and when someone is 18 within a family will not necessarily change, and if it does, then they can still get their licence when they are 18. Additionally, the option of giving public transport instead of driving is possibly feasible, but public transport takes more time. Whether you are living in rural areas or in the city, it generally takes more time to take public transport somewhere than it does to drive, and time is money. People could be spending this time working or doing fun activities, as you say that 17-year-olds want to do. Trust our young people. Let them live their lives in the way they can and want to.

Sandy GANESH: The government argues the difference between a 17-year-old and an 18-year-old is insignificant, but several studies have proven that this is precisely the age demographic that has one of the highest amounts of road accidents. Sixteen to 18 is a crucial stage of development, where mental changes do not just happen over years but over mere months and even weeks. Even if a 17-year-old were able to log 120 hours, they still likely would not have retained as much knowledge and expertise as they would in another year. Additionally, the mental capacity test cannot ensure complete competency and responsibility. Allowing 17-year-olds on our roads will not only be irresponsible, it will be fatal. Although increasing convenience for this age range is a commendable goal, risking lives simply is not worth it.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Anna Scott): I call on the sponsor of the bill for their right of reply.

Hamayle ASMAT: The opposition has mentioned many times that young people make up a large number of accidents. However, there is no specific age given; the ages that make up a large number of accidents are between 17 and 22. So I would like the opposition to complete their research before throwing out false information. The opposition also mentioned that the mental capacity test is discriminatory. However, the mental capacity test is specific to driving performance on the road. It does not test factors associated with mental health. Moreover, as specified in clause 8, the mental capacity test will be made by a mental health professional to achieve the maximum level of inclusivity. The opposition also mentioned that we can make transportation better. However, time is money, and the more time you spend waiting around for the bus, the more time lost from the things we love. In conclusion, this is not just a matter of convenience, it is a matter of fairness, opportunity and supporting the next generation. The current laws are holding our capable and responsible youth back. I stand here with absolute certainty that this change is essential. Lowering the provisional licence age to 17 will empower our youth, ease the burden on families and strengthen our communities. We cannot afford to delay any longer. It is time for change, time for action. I request every member of this house to think about this bill and how this bill will affect our youth – help our youth, our families and our generation. I urge every member of this house to vote in favour of this bill for our young people, for their future and for the progress of our society.

The ACTING PRESIDENT: The question is:

That the Provisional License and Learners Permit Reform Bill 2025 be now read a second and a third time.

House divided on motion:

Ayes	30
Noes	18
Majority in favour	12

Motion agreed to.

Read second time.

Read third time.

Sitting suspended 3:28 pm until 3:47 pm.

Increased Job Opportunities for Newly Arrived People Bill 2025

Sponsor: SECL Youth Leaders

Refuter: Kyabram P-12 College

Introduction and first reading

Hamid TAWASULLI: I move:

That I have leave to introduce a bill titled Increased Job Opportunities for Newly Arrived People Bill 2025.

Motion agreed to.

Read first time.

Second reading

Hamid TAWASULLI: Before we begin, we will be talking about the experiences of newly arrived people in Australia. If you wish to leave, please do so now. I move:

That the bill be now read a second time.

Our bill aims to create increased job opportunities for newly arrived people. The bill aims to establish a board to support newly arrived individuals through job application workshops, English courses, financial incentives for businesses and welfare assistance for those in need. Each year approximately half a million people arrive in Australia, and it is our duty to look after them. Newly arrived people in Australia, especially in their first 12 months, face a variety of challenges in joining the workforce. This bill aims to address these challenges in a variety of ways. We aim to enhance language challenges, provide financial support and encourage businesses to offer training. The main purpose of this bill is to increase the accessibility of the English language and establish welfare systems for newly arrived people who are not eligible for welfare but are in desperate need. With this, we aim to promote social inclusion, economic participation and economic prosperity.

We outline the establishment of a board. This board will be called the Newly Arrived Peoples Job Opportunities Board. The board will be responsible for implementing the initiatives of the bill. By having a board, we can oversee the implementation of the bill, giving an oversight that will ensure the aims of the bill are met. This board will meet at least every three months, holding more meetings as they see fit. We outline the establishment of workshops for newly arrived people. These workshops could cover teaching topics including but not limited to resume writing, cover letters and interpreting jobs. Ensuring newly arrived people are given the skills they need to gain employment is extremely important, as is that they have ongoing opportunities to productively engage in the Australian economy. Ensuring these workshops are held in places like local libraries, community centres and council buildings ensures that communities are involved in supporting each other. We also outline the incentives that will be offered to businesses to encourage them to provide additional training opportunities for newly arrived people. It is understandable that businesses do not want to spend extra dollars on training newly arrived people. However, by providing these incentives to businesses we are giving them a reason to train newly arrived people. Eventually this will be amazing for our economy as we gain more and more skilled labour. Furthermore, we also outline the need to increase the accessibility of the English language. The board will be required to create online courses to teach newly arrived people English. This is extremely important because knowing the language of the country you are living in is key to being able to live productively within the society, so giving newly arrived people the opportunity to learn the language free of charge will open many doors for them.

Finally, our bill outlines the financial support that should be given to newly arrived people who are not eligible for welfare benefits, ensuring that newly arrived people are able to live safely in our community. Without safety and food, it is impossible to even consider starting to learn new skills like a new language, hence the need to ensure people are given the financial support they need until they can participate in the workforce. Let us enact this bill and empower individuals with the opportunity to succeed.

Matilda SOWTER: To start off my speech, I would just like to bring attention to the bill. It was evidently written in good faith and with the aim to aid newly arrived individuals to our country. However, most who have actually read the bill noticed that it is poorly written, has loopholes and has no true way to enforce it and what it aims to achieve. As the chamber, we certainly cannot let this pass in its current form. This bill contains numerous flaws ranging from minor issues like vague definitions and imprecise language to more significant problems such as the lack of clarity regarding the intent behind several key elements. We only highlight these concerns in good faith, hoping the government will address and correct them. A major issue with this bill is found in clause 6. It declares that there will be incentives for companies to train newly arrived people, but these incentives only apply when the person is hired and trained. What actually keeps the companies keeping them as employees? What stops them from firing them? What about the supposed zero interest loans? Zero interest loans are meant to be used to buy essentials like food and appliances or to pay rent. But there is virtually no incentive to pay these loans off. These incentives can be easily exploited and ultimately hurt these immigrants more than help them – how shameful.

Another major issue found within this bill is in clause 5. These workshops the government seems to love to offer are highly biased; they wish to supply workshops to newly arrived persons, but not to many people, including those who have lived in Australia past that first 12 months and those who have lived here since birth. Equality is a principle we hold dear here in Australia as Australians, but how exactly do they claim to be Australian and uphold this value while considering discriminatory legislation such as this bill? This bill aims to create a board known as NAPJOB. The opposition's question is: why create an entire board for this piece of proposed legislation when it could be made a much simpler task by handing it off to another existing system and expanding its field? In clause 4 it discusses who the board will contain as members. But how many? What is the maximum? What is the minimum? What will stop one corrupt individual from staying however long they want for an undetermined number of terms? Wouldn't this hurt newly arrived individuals? Structures and systems can easily be put in place so that newly arrived individuals can be aided in their new life, rather than creating an entire board, which costs time, money and labour. The intent and purpose of this bill is amazing. I cannot deny that. It is wanting to help so many individuals, but it does not achieve what it is made for. In its current state, it hurts more than it heals.

Madina HAKIMI: I rise on behalf of South East Community Links in full support of the Increased Job Opportunities for Newly Arrived People Bill 2025. Today I speak about one of its most important outcomes: improving mental health for newly arrived people. When someone moves to a new country, everything is unfamiliar. There is no job, no income and no family, and for many there is not even the language to ask for help. That level of uncertainty and isolation takes a serious toll on mental wellbeing. This bill responds to that with more than promises. It gives newly arrived people real hope and real support. It provides free English classes so people can confidently communicate, apply for jobs and feel included in daily life; job application workshops that teach people how to write résumés, understand job ads and prepare for interviews – skills that can reduce stress and build confidence; and financial assistance for those who are ineligible for settling, so they are not left struggling alone. These are more than just policies, they are lifelines, because mental health is threatened when people do not feel safe, capable and supported. This bill gives people the tools to rebuild not just their careers but their confidence, purpose and connection to the community. I urge you to support this bill not just for its economic benefits but for the mental wellbeing and dignity of every person starting a new life in Victoria.

Xander GRIFFITHS: The bill states that NAPJOB will incorporate a zero-interest loan incentive for these companies. This is simply unrealistic. A zero-interest policy would lead companies to be less trustworthy due to there being no mentioned consequences of failing to meet the loan requirements in an acceptable timeframe. Creating interest-free loans incentivises the wrong things, which are unwanted. This includes using newly arrived Australians just for these interest-free loans and other incentives, rather than their actual abilities or capabilities that they should be being hired for. Having interest is what keeps companies honest, and it ensures that they repay loans in an appropriate time. Without interest, companies are not held to a standard and are able to run on their own time. Interest-free loans are unfortunately not possible, because they will stop companies from being honest and will halt the true reasons why newly arrived Australians should be getting these jobs.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Lily Trethowan): Just before we keep going, I would like to acknowledge member for South-Eastern Metropolitan Region Mr Lee Tarlamis currently in the gallery watching this right now. Thank you for being here.

Kris van der KAMP: I speak today in support of this bill because it is not just about jobs, it is about opportunity and community. Not only does this bill provide financial aid to newly arrived people but it also gives them the tools they need to no longer need that financial support. Finding a job requires more than just financial support. It requires communication skills and job-related skills like resume and cover letter writing. Job opportunities have been denied to so many people because they have simply never had the chance to learn these crucial skills. This bill gives people that chance. By offering classes to enhance English skills we are giving people a voice that allows them to apply for jobs, contribute to their community and pass on their knowledge. Additionally, by offering workshops to teach job-related skills like resume and cover letter writing, interpreting job advertisements and vocabulary surrounding job descriptions, we are giving people real tools they can use their whole lives. This bill will also have a positive impact on the larger community. Newly arrived people who have gotten this education can go on to share this with other members of their community, ensuring the community as a whole is lifted up. This bill is not meant to be a handout. It is an investment in our future, an investment in people who want to work, who want to belong and who want to build a strong future in this country. Equipping people with language and skills will help them stand on their own and integrate better into society, and we all benefit from a stronger, more engaged and more inclusive society. Let us pass this bill and give people the opportunity to thrive.

Killara HEYWOOD: I believe that this bill has great initiative but does not rule out many necessities. For newly arrived people to secure a job there need to be structures and systems put into place. In clause 5 there are multiple examples of how to get a job but not actually any examples of, or workshops on, how newly arrived people can stay employed. The establishment of NAPJOB has been mentioned and includes many examples of how it works and what it will achieve. It is stated that NAPJOB helps newly arrived people to gain skills when applying for jobs in Australia. However, it does not mention any ways to maintain a role in the workforce. Even though this bill speaks on how to get a job and how to apply for a job, it does not state how newly arrived people are going to stay employed, which is what should have been the main focus when establishing workshops. Getting a job is one thing, but actually having the skills and knowledge of how to obtain a job can be a major issue, especially when people are new to a country and do not exactly know or understand how employment and having a career works. Despite the fact that this bill is aiming to create changes for a major cause, they have not established key structures and systems which will positively impact on how their board will support newly arrived people.

Georgia NEICHO: This bill is not just a moral investment; it is a smart economic one. While people may argue that there are only economic downfalls to financially supporting newly arrived people, there are many unrecognised benefits. By both supporting people financially and teaching newly arrived people skills that they need to enter the workforce, they are filling essential positions in the job market. Australia is facing a skills shortage across many sectors, and fresh perspectives and people can help fill these gaps. We are not just offering jobs; we are unlocking potential. People who are in the workforce have a lot less reliance or even no reliance at all on government subsidises, meaning government can use this money on other important things. Additionally, people who work pay taxes. Studies show that when migrants and refugees are integrated into a workforce, they contribute more in taxes, start businesses at a higher rate and increase overall productivity. Every person who finds a job becomes a taxpayer and a consumer. A new study shows that over the long term both high- and low-skilled workers who migrate bring benefits to their new home countries by increasing income per person and living standards. The bill's financial incentives for businesses to train and hire newcomers not only promote inclusion but also foster innovation. Migrants bring global perspectives, diversity, experiences and entrepreneurial spirit, traits that strengthen our economy from the ground up. This bill is an investment in people, and people are the economy. When we lift barriers, we raise incomes, increase tax contributions and build more dynamic, inclusive and resilient workforces.

Lachlan RODRIQUEZ: Clause 6 of the bill talks about incentives for companies to train newly arrived people in the form of grants, rebates and zero-interest loans. While this does give corporations a reason to give newly arrived people jobs, it also begs the question: is this bill going to help these people, or is it just going to benefit the big companies and give them even more money? Throwing money at these corporations will not solve this statewide issue in the long run and could instead create its own issues, such as companies only hiring newly arrived people for the loans and grants and hiring no other Victorian people. How can we expect to help these people when we are putting all the money into these corporations instead of the people we are trying to help? These incentives will also lead to newly arrived citizens being hired just for the grants but not truly integrated into the workplace or trained properly. While this idea could work to incentivise companies to hire newly arrived people, there are better ways to achieve this which create a longer term solution to this issue while also benefiting newly arrived people. By focusing on companies this bill puts too much money into corporations and not enough into the people it is trying to help.

Matilda FEEHAN: This bill not only creates opportunities for newly arrived people but also supports businesses simultaneously, therefore supporting the Victorian economy. Many newcomers to Australia are job ready but are overlooked due to a lack of Australian experience. This bill offers the opportunity to address and mend these issues by implementing grants for businesses, which provide training for newly arrived Australians. This creates incentives for businesses and companies and creates opportunity for newly arrived Australians to gain experience in the workforce. Providing businesses with financial benefits encourages them to take on newly arrived Australians, thus creating a chance for newly arrived Australians to gain work experience. In order for this bill to be implemented and create change, businesses and companies need access to resources to take on and train newly arrived Australians. This can come in the form of not only grants but also rebates and zero-interest loans. Allowing zero interest loans does not mean that businesses will be dishonest. It merely provides motives for said businesses. This bill gives employers a reason to say yes and builds long-term skills and careers, not just jobs.

Declan DAVIDSON: I would firstly like to applaud the government on their idea. Helping newly arrived people upskill to allow them to get jobs is absolutely vital. However, this cannot come at the expense of the upskilling of people who have been here for longer than 12 months, especially those who are immigrants. These workshops outlined in clause 5 are nothing less than discriminatory. I understand that this bill is focusing on newly arrived people, but there is no reason that these workshops should not be accessible to anyone in need of services – that need that help to apply for a job and then get a job. The fact that these workshops are going to be hosted in local public establishments should actually encourage anyone to access these workshops, rather than dividing people based on their immigration status. The government actually has an incredible opportunity to allow newly arrived people to connect with deeply rooted members of their community. While commendable in intention, this bill much needs some reform to actually equate newly arrived people and local communities. I would also like to clarify that I believe in the ideas behind this bill, but there need to be some massive structural reforms before this bill is ready to be passed. While employment is highly important, the notion of community interconnectedness is equally important, if not more so, for both immigrants who are newly arrived and those who have been here for longer than 12 months.

Tilly STECHER: For newly arrived parents in Australia the ability to study and build a future can often seem impossible, not due to lack of ambition or determination but rather due to the lack of affordable, accessible child care. This is particularly the case for women, some of whom come from cultures where they traditionally have the responsibility of staying at home and caring for children. This expectation to stay at home creates a significant barrier in that women may feel pressured into not studying. Providing these childcare services addresses this critical hurdle and allows women to pursue education without feeling as though they are neglecting their responsibilities at home. It acknowledges that supporting a child and building a life in a new country should not be mutually exclusive. This clause targets a gap in the system where support is currently lacking, where people are locked out of opportunities not because of ability but because of circumstance. Notably, clause 7.2 also provides a safe space for children who have recently moved to Australia to build connections and gain a sense of belonging in circumstances where they may otherwise find this difficult. Clause 7.1 of the bill ensures that newly arrived people have access to free online English courses, improving inclusion, confidence and employability. Developing online courses and providing free child care to students is a worthy investment for the government. According to the 2021 census nearly 30 per cent of Australia's population was born overseas. By investing in accessible child care and free language education for newly arrived people, the government will be laying the groundwork for long-term economic and social benefits. When a greater portion of this 30 per cent is empowered to gain qualifications and enter skilled careers, the economy will benefit from a more diverse, capable and productive workforce.

Patrick HENDERSON: In clause 8 of this bill an entire framework for providing welfare benefits solely for newly arrived people is established. Creating and maintaining a social services agency of this scale from scratch would come at a tremendous cost, encompassing customer service centres statewide, advanced financial services systems and fraud detection and prevention mechanisms that would take years to implement, with enormous difficulty and a price tag that would far surpass the welfare itself. Luckily such frameworks already exist in Australia, the state-based Service Victoria and Centrelink federally, and yet this bill will make zero attempt to integrate its proposals into existing networks. Instead it simply adds another layer of meaningless bureaucracy to an already bloated public sector. Who does or does not receive financial benefits should be left up to Centrelink to decide or at the very least fall under the purview of Service Victoria, both organisations with a well-developed, pre-established capacity to make informed decisions about a welfare scheme and its capabilities. In contrast, this bill proposes a sloppy and ambiguous system rife with redundancy, which would ultimately serve as nothing more than a waste of time, effort and resources. Coupled with the bill's total lack of consistency, clarity and direction and proposed programs that are both ineffective and vulnerable to exploitation, this bill will not make life any better for recently arrived persons, despite its good intentions. What it will do is fill the pockets of private corporations, make finding employment and housing more difficult for all Victorians and cause serious, lasting damage to Victorian public institutions.

Shanay GAO-KUHLMANN: The opposition's first speaker claimed Australia to be a place of equality, something the bill is apparently not. However, the opposition appears to not understand the concept of equity, so let me explain it for them. While equality gives everyone the same, it fails to consider the vulnerable. Equity, on the other hand, gives to those what they need to reach the same level as others. Immigrants require this equitable treatment to reach an equal state. This bill does not take away from Australian citizens, but it does give so much to our hardworking immigrants. We must also consider how these language classes will benefit citizens as they ease communication struggles. We have all experienced it, a language barrier when you are checking out at the supermarket or placing an order. These classes aid immigrants with the burden of learning English, which is noted as one of the hardest languages in the world to learn. This benefits Australians and immigrants alike by aiding a transition to smooth communication. Additionally, we cannot ignore the roles of the very immigrants who work in low-paying or seemingly low-class jobs that Australian citizens simply do not want to work in. Fostering immigrants' job skills is crucial in aiding the economy and job market.

Kenzie DAWBER: What does financial support have to do with job opportunities? Clause 8.2 states that monthly allowances to assist with basic needs will be given out. How does giving out food to those who need it have anything to do with job opportunities? There is no clear correlation between having allowances to assist with food and housing and job opportunities. How is this proclaimed financial support supposed to increase job opportunities? This bill is unclear, confusing and not relevant to itself.

Friday NUNEZA: The opposition claims that they want equality yet disregards initiatives such as the zero interest loans and the allowances, not accounting for the fact that a lot of newly arrived people would have possible financial burdens and barriers, especially with the lack of job opportunities that they are provided due to their experience in the Australian job market. While all these investments are not the only way to help immigrants and asylum seekers, they are a step towards providing opportunities to the people that make up a whole lot of Australia.

Devna KARTHIGEYAN: I would like to direct everyone's attention to clause 8.3, where one of the factors that determines eligibility for newly arrived people to receive the abovementioned support is that it needs to be attained within the first 12 months of arrival – as has been mentioned, the first 12 months. Does the government even realise how much of a change migrating is and how awfully long it takes newly arrived people to learn the ways of a state and country? This bill mentions nothing about how newly arrived people will be made aware of the fact that such a support system exists to aid them. Without even knowing that they do not need to struggle immensely and navigate their own way in a foreign place, how would newly arrived people even access this support in the startlingly short amount of time that is 12 months? This bill in its current state is almost taunting in the sense that it is available and unavailable to people who desperately need it simultaneously. This is beyond inconvenient. This is flawed.

Imogen O'SHANNESY: The opposition claims that this bill is discriminatory towards those who were born here, among many other assumptions that are discriminatory in and of themselves. To that I ask the opposition: did you genuinely read the bill – even the title? This bill is not aimed at Australian-born citizens but is aimed at our newly arrived citizens and immigrants. Therefore I fail to see the relevance of this argument. To further this point, we the government feel that using the term 'discriminatory' to describe a service that is not for everybody and only focuses on a group that receives a high level of racism aimed at them is a blatantly beyond-ignorant argument from the opposition. To echo the member beside me: equity over equality, every single time. I clearly must have been mistaken in thinking everybody was aware of this.

Maddison GOODCHILD: I would like to bring your attention to clause 4, which has the board. This board has a huge flaw that cannot be in any way looked over. With few qualifications, anyone can be on this board, which leaves the question of whether the newly arrived people are being represented correctly. This bill also does not state how many people will be on this board. This means you could have three people representing thousands, right? This bill is a great idea; however, it still needs more details for it to be great.

Fatima KHURRAM: The opposition claims that companies can simply train newly arrived people, take the incentives and then fire them. But why would they do that? They have a fully capable and skilled worker that the company themselves have trained, leaving no logical reason for them to fire the person they have poured their time and effort into training. If for some nonsensical reason they did, the newly arrived person would still have received this training and would now have the adequate skills of a worker that many other employers are looking for. This just increases their level of employability and provides them more opportunities to get hired.

Bodhi COLLINS: This bill is a humane bill, a bill that comes from the heart. Australia and Victoria have a rich migrant story made up of many individual stories. However, this bill, although its intentions are pure, is not a suitable idea. Clause 8 outlines financial support for newly arrived people not eligible for Centrelink. The federal government, who have determined that these individuals are not eligible for Centrelink, will find that the state government, under this bill proposed by this government, is undermining their powers, their jurisdiction. Section 51 of the Australian constitution gives the federal government power over immigration matters, over matters such as welfare. This government has failed to consider the most important legal document in the land. Welfare, yes, helps people, but it is unsustainable when given out by a board – a board that is unelected, a board that is unaccountable to Victorians, a board that has no practical expertise and is made up of people who do not understand the Victorian government's processes. This is another layer of bureaucracy that the state of Victoria, as mentioned by many members of this opposition, does not need. Victoria does not need this irrelevant board that will create more problems than what it will try to fix. To the last point, what about the unemployed here in Victoria, the many people doing it tough, the people who cannot put meals on the table? We as a country, as a state, should be looking after the people we have here first, before we can help our neighbours, before we can help our friends. This intention, the idea is pure, but the substance is lacking. I call on all members in this chamber to not support this bill, because this bill should be thought of in a better way.

Gabriel Di FALCO: The people this bill seeks to support are often starting from scratch, unemployed in a new country thousands of kilometres away from home and sometimes with little money to their name. What the opposition must understand is that this bill is helping newly arrived people just get a foot in the door of the Victorian workforce, because that first step is often the hardest. By providing a smoother path to employment for newly arrived people we could potentially change the lives of countless individuals and even their families. We promote Victoria as a land of opportunity where people from all walks of life can lead a better life, but without access to invaluable employment opportunities and training, this promise is nothing but a fallacy. How do we increase the supply of jobs and training pathways, you may ask? We incentivise businesses to provide these through the addition of grants, zero-interest loans and rebates. Businesses big and small can assist us in our mission to gain more skilled workers and diversify our workforce. There is no guarantee that the newly arrived people will be able to gain long-term employment directly from their trainers. But we are nonetheless helping them get a foot in the door, and as they accumulate experience and training, they will become more attractive employees for Victorian businesses overall, helping them build a better life with stable employment and helping us boost and futureproof our economy. It is win-win legislation, and we cannot let this slip.

Nuradin MOHAMMED: We already have organisations that aim to assist newly arrived people. Instead of creating a whole new service, there should just be investments in existing services.

Alison VONG: This bill fills the gap left by Centrelink. Far too many newly arrived people fall through the cracks. They are not eligible for Centrelink, even though they cannot find work yet and have no financial safety net. This bill fills that gap by providing monthly living allowances, emergency support and access to affordable services like public transport and health care. This is about basic dignity, ensuring that no-one in Victoria is left behind without help. Everyone deserves the chance to get on their feet, and this bill makes that possible.

Yuwaluxshayan KANNAN: Clause 4.4 says that the board will be comprised of newly arrived peoples from varying backgrounds. But these newly arrived people are the same people that they say need English classes and that need to know how this system works. If they do not know this, how are they part of the board and how will they support themselves? This makes no sense. Additionally, with clause 6, as mentioned before, what is stopping companies from recycling newly arrived people just so that they can keep getting these grants and getting more money without really having to do any work? Of those people who need these services when they arrive here, most are already linked to services, and they continue to receive support. Instead of creating a new system where they can receive help, it is a better use of our funding to invest in these services that already help them and to continue to grow these services. Doubling up and not building upon existing services is just going to be a hassle.

Layla KTAIFAN: Not everyone begins life in Victoria on equal ground. Some people arrive after war, poverty or political violence. Others come with hope but no support, no job and no language skills. This bill provides something simple but powerful – a fair start. It offers access to English, employment and financial support so no-one is left behind just because of their background or visa. Equal opportunity is not just a slogan; it is a responsibility. Let us make sure that everyone in our state, no matter where they come from, gets the chance to succeed.

The ACTING PRESIDENT: I now call on the sponsor of the bill for the right of reply.

Hamid TAWASULLI: I have heard so many ideas. There were so many assumptions and so many false, irrelevant questions from the opposition party. For example, ‘Why create a board when there are already other entities who can focus on the goals of the board?’ I would say we cannot trust any entity other than this board to focus on these goals primarily, because other entities would rather focus on their own goals rather than these goals. Another point that the opposition mentioned was that the board is to be comprised of newly arrived people. I would say that is a false assumption. We have mentioned that the board will be comprised of experts from different departments and of different multicultural people. Another assumption that the opposition made was how the 12-month period would be enough. I would say that the workshops in the local library, council building and community centres will spread awareness in no time that these services are available for them; they are there to help them. The opposition argued in the negative on the clause associated with the support of newly arrived migrants, but we ask for the recognition behind the boost that can come with employees such as skilled migrants, and the boost to the Australian economy is associated with fulfilling pay. Finally, it is our responsibility to create a society where all newly arrived people should feel welcome.

The ACTING PRESIDENT: The question is:

That the Increased Job Opportunities for Newly Arrived People Bill 2025 be now read a second and a third time.

House divided on motion:

Ayes 34

Noes 14

Majority in favour 20

Motion agreed to.

Read second time.

Read third time.

Youth Council adjourned 4:34 pm.