

PARLIAMENT OF VICTORIA

YMCA YOUTH PARLIAMENT 2026

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY CHAMBER

Thursday 2 July 2026

2026 Youth Governor: Scarlet Lee

Program Director: Kaitlin Woolford

Active Citizens

Akshara Vasudevan
Izaan Ahmah Srambiyan
Nish Shetty
Pranav Balasubramaniam
Raghav Ananthanathan
Vishnu Easwar

CREATE Foundation

Crystal Compton-Robins
Harmony Harris
Joel Smith
Zoe-Ann Franklin

Hume Youth Services

Ayaan Abdullah
Helel Beirouti
Isabelle Rose Marovitch
Talal Naveed
Tehreem Lugmani
Kanza Ali

Kyabram P-12 College

Dakota Ryan
Kallan Wright
Layne Warde
Peyton Croft
Xander Freemantle
Yane Nemenko

Overnewton Anglican Community College

Ada Ozkan
Barnaby Trimble
Chloe Ord-Hume
Isaiah Jayasooriya
Komal Gill
Laura Ord-Hume

Boroondara City Council

Angus Wright
Cecilia Xu
Evangeline Flynn
Livia Sum Yi Wong
Rahul Doloi
Thomas Curkowskyj

Hoppers Crossing Secondary College

Charlotte Fleming
Golbarg Mastouri (Grace)
Samyukta Mada
Sara Sultana
Syakir Amni Saifudin (Syakir)
Zeinab Abdo

John Fawcner College

Airah Nauman
Anisa Shah
Arisha Prasad
Ayesha Khan

Multicultural Community Services Geelong Youth Council

Angelica Febriola Euginia
Erfan Rahimy
Hteemoo Yohellaymusaw
Paris Junnoel Marcleo Mina
Roqya Hussein
Sarbjee Singh

Westbourne Grammar School

Casey Clarkson
Charlotte McVeigh
Grhita Sundaram
Mahi Desai
Mannat Srivastava
Marlee McGrath

The ACTING SPEAKER (Kathleen Matthews-Ward) took the chair at 9:32 am.

The ACTING SPEAKER: To begin, I acknowledge that we are on the lands of the Wurundjeri. We pay our respects to their elders past and present.

First I just want to welcome you all here. It is great to have some young people in Parliament. I love hearing your voices in here. I think it is really important that we listen to our young people. What I love the most about young people are the ideas, the freshness and the perspectives that you bring. So I really cannot tell you how happy I am to have you here.

I am the member for Broadmeadows, and I have got a whole lot of the crew from the north here, so I am particularly interested in hearing your views. I think to see the Active Citizens here too is wonderful. We all, I think, value democracy, and the only way to keep that alive is by being involved: by asking questions, by having ideas, by putting yourselves forward and having the courage to do that. So what I see in this room at the moment are a whole lot of courage, a whole lot of active citizens, and I am really proud to be part of that today.

The other thing I want to say is this is an incredibly important topic, and I think it is only getting more important as we go forward. I think our beautiful multicultural community is at threat at the moment with One Nation and others who are trying to divide us, and it breaks my heart to see that happen in Australia. I am very lucky to represent one of the most diverse communities in the world, probably, where we have got people speaking hundreds of different languages and we see the incredible contributions of all of us every day. At the end of the day, unless you are First Nations, we are all migrants in this country and we all contribute a lot. It is great to have you here. I am looking forward to this debate. First I call upon the sponsor of the bill.

Bills

Multicultural Inclusion Education in Secondary School Curricula Bill 2026

Sponsor: Hume Youth Services

Refuter: Multicultural Community Services Geelong Youth Council

Introduction and first reading

Talal NAVEED: I move:

That the bill be now read a first time.

Read first time.

Second reading

Talal NAVEED: This speech contains mention of violence and war. If these topics make anyone uncomfortable, I ask that you excuse yourself now. I move:

That the bill be now read a second time.

Good morning, or in my mother tongue, as-salamu alaykum. I would like to begin by acknowledging the traditional owners of the land upon which we are gathered here today and pay my respects to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples past, present and emerging. I also acknowledge that the land is stolen and that sovereignty was never ceded. I extend my acknowledgement to the Palestinian people in Gaza who till today continue to experience suffering, displacement and genocide. I also acknowledge the Uighur people facing repression, the Sudanese people suffering at the hands of internal conflict and the Afghan people who have faced persecution and political instability for decades now. While these may seem to be just distant tragedies outside the scope of our state, these are the lived experiences for many families across Victoria. Somehow our state and nation, one that is applauded for its cultural diversity, still suffers from a severe lack of education on these ethnicities and many more.

My fellow parliamentarians, I rise today to present my team's bill, an antidote to the plague of ignorance our state is currently facing. I present to you all the Multicultural Inclusion Education in Secondary School Curricula Bill 2026. This bill seeks to put an end to the widespread ignorance on these crucial topics by a

multimodal means of learning, targeting secondary school students in years 7 to 10. These years are the perfect balance in their ability to comprehend and empathise with the learning topics, as some can include mature topics of war and violence unsuitable for a primary school student. Our bill aims to secure student retention of these topics by using different means of student involvement. This involves changes to the curriculum, particularly the introduction of a contemporary history school subject. The subject educates students on the various time periods in which Australia has had influxes of migration and the reasons respectively behind them. We aim to support this change in education through professional development changes for teachers.

However, we all know that sitting down in a classroom and force-feeding them information, while they may retain it for the sake of passing their tests, gives them no motivation to empathise or understand – enter clause 8, VidCon. VidCon is a cultural expo held in the heart of Victoria inviting secondary students to immerse themselves in a venue full of stalls, performances and seminars of various ethnic backgrounds. We Victorians use the Welcome to Country simply to pay respects to the Indigenous. I would like to educate everyone in this room for a moment: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples use multimodal learning to pass knowledge down the generations. This involves song, dance, storytelling and much more. VidCon has taken inspiration from exactly that, from our Indigenous elders, employing the same multimodal immersion of participants to encourage personal understanding and empathy. It is psychologically proven that learning is not passive; it is lived. Our bill has adapted to this using the wisdom of our respected Indigenous elders. Overseeing the implementation of the above would be the Victorian Board of Multicultural Education in collaboration with the VCAA. The board would be audited every five years and the curriculum every two years.

My fellow parliamentarians, we all come from various backgrounds, beliefs and walks of life, yet each of us has an equal opportunity to be heard in this very room. It is only fair that we extend this right beyond the four walls of this house, so join me in eliminating the bias, the ignorance and the lack of perspective. We all belong to this great nation, so why should some of us cop bad stares as we eat with our hands or speak our mother tongues or choose to represent our cultures in a country where our different backgrounds are what make us exactly the same? My team is soon going to explain the detail of this bill to the house, and I know that they will do an amazing job. But change starts right here. I ask that you all come up with a reasonable decision in your hearts and reflect such in your votes. Victoria needs change, and here change stands before you all in the form of a bill that mitigates the ignorance, the racism and the prejudice that is plaguing our state. Make that change.

Paris Junnoel Marcleo MINA: I rise today on behalf of the Multicultural Community Services Geelong Youth Council, the youth council of Cultura – although if you were to read the government's own bill, specifically clause 5.2(b), you would be forgiven for thinking we were still called Diversitat. Diversitat became Cultura more than 1500 days ago. That is more than 1500 opportunities for the government to update its records and get it right. But here we are debating a bill that still gets one of its own multicultural stakeholders wrong. For a bill that repeatedly speaks about multicultural inclusion, that is a disappointing oversight. It may seem like a small detail, but details matter, consultation matters and accuracy matters because every young Victorian deserves inclusive education that delivers. If the government cannot correctly identify one of the very organisations it proposes to work alongside, how can this house have confidence that the government has undertaken the meaningful consultation and has the resources needed to get the rest of this bill right?

But the government's lack of research does not stop there. No, it does not. I now draw the house's attention to clause 7, where the government proposes the introduction of an entirely new standalone contemporary history subject for every student from years 7 to 10. How has the government forgotten that Victoria already has a curriculum? The Victorian Curriculum F–10 already requires students to learn about Australia's migrant communities and the social and political changes that have shaped our nation. Students already explore migration and its contribution to Australian society as part of the existing curriculum. Yet nowhere in this bill does the government acknowledge that this content already exists. Nor does it explain why creating an entirely new subject is a better outcome than strengthening what is already being taught in Victorian classrooms.

Do not get me wrong, on this side of the house we do not oppose strengthening multicultural inclusive education within Victorian schools; in fact, we welcome it. What we oppose is the unnecessary duplication without first strengthening what already exists. The Victorian curriculum already teaches Australia's migration story, but if this government believes that there are gaps, then let us strengthen the curriculum that is already in place. Let us work with the teachers, with the principals, with the VCAA and with multicultural communities to improve what Victorians already have, rather than replacing it with an entirely new standalone subject. On this side of the house we believe that every young Victorian deserves inclusive education that delivers, and that

means good governments that strengthen and invest in public education, not duplicate it. Good governments back up teachers that are already delivering for Victorian families. They recognise the amazing work of our wonderful teachers every day to support, to inspire and to educate our students.

Finally, good governments build on strong foundations rather than creating new layers of reform that place greater pressure on classrooms already doing the heavy lifting. Every hour spent adapting to unnecessary curriculum reform is an hour taken away from teaching young Victorians. Good governments are not measured by the number of programs that they announce. They are measured by the outcomes that they deliver. Clearly this government has more work and research to do. It should strengthen what already works and maybe, just maybe, get multicultural communities' names right this time. Until this government is prepared to do the work, I cannot in good conscience support this bill, and neither should this house.

But let me remind you, fellow honourable members, we cannot ignore the reality facing Victorian schools today. Across our state, schools continue to face teacher workforce shortages, increasing workloads and growing pressures on the educators we heavily rely upon every single day. Yet instead of supporting and retaining the workforce, this government proposes another 100 minutes of teaching each week and another layer of reform for teachers to implement. This is not how we strengthen public education. These responsibilities do not appear overnight. They will fall on the shoulders of our teachers. Again, until this government is prepared to do the work, I cannot in good conscience support this bill, and neither should this house, because every young Victorian deserves inclusive education that exists.

Isabelle Rose MAROVITCH: What does it say to a Victorian student when they can sit through 13 years of education and never once see themselves in it, never once hear their story told? Victoria is one of the most culturally diverse places on earth and for far too long our curriculum has barely noticed. Students learn about migration from classrooms devoid of the people who have lived it. Diversity is taught from a stage that neither reflects nor advocates for it in an environment where 40 per cent of students experience racial discrimination. This bill changes that. Clause 5 requires the Victorian Board of Multicultural Education to establish genuine partnerships with multicultural organisations, community groups and advocacy bodies, organisations like Foundation House, the Centre for Multicultural Youth and the Ethnic Communities Council of Victoria. They are organisations with decades of experience in refugee support, youth engagement and intercultural advocacy, organisations that have spent years earning the trust of communities that educational institutions have repeatedly let down, finally promoting sincere representation in Victoria's schools. Under clause 5 these organisations do not just advise from the sidelines, they contribute lived experience to curriculum development, train our teachers, run workshops and culture-focused speaker programs and help deliver the Victorian Cultural Conference. But most critically the organisations will engage with themselves, reflecting Victoria's cultural and linguistic diversity so the voices overseeing our education finally match the students in the classroom. For students from migrant and refugee backgrounds this will mean access to role models and speakers who have lived their experience, not just studied it. Research constantly links cultural affirmation in schools to improved attendance and engagement and reduced rates of racial isolation, outcomes no textbook alone can deliver. This bill will bring the community into our schools, because multicultural inclusion will never fit on a PowerPoint slide and belonging cannot be taught from a distance.

Angelica Febriola EUGINIA: I would like to start by stating that education for multiculturalism is indeed crucial for social cohesion, and this side of the house is testimony of that. Unfortunately this bill is trying too hard to live beyond its means. I draw attention to clause 6.3, which requires every participating school to undertake a 1-hour foundation session for teachers' personal development, followed by a compulsory 4-hour intensive training session annually. This is preposterous. While the intention is commendable, this clause fails to recognise the reality facing our education system today: Victoria is already experiencing significant teacher shortages, schools are struggling to recruit staff, existing teachers are carrying heavier workloads and many are already overwhelmed by administrative responsibility. In this context mandating an additional 4 hours of compulsory training for every school community is simply unrealistic. Four hours may appear insignificant on paper, but across an entire teaching workforce it represents hours upon hours taken away from lesson preparations, assessments and classroom teaching. This clause also states that schools must then develop a multicultural inclusion statement. If the government actually did their research, they would know that this mandate already exists within the intercultural capability of the Victorian curriculum. The government also has not explained when this training will occur. Will it be delivered during school hours, requiring relief teachers that many schools cannot secure, or will teachers be expected to complete it outside of working hours, further

contributing to their extreme burnout? Good policy should support teachers, not place additional demands on an already struggling system, so vote for less bureaucracy – vote nay.

Kanza ALI: I would like to draw the house's attention to clause 6 of the Multicultural Inclusion Education in Secondary School Curricula Bill 2026. This clause establishes a comprehensive professional development program that ensures schools are not simply expected to become more inclusive but they are given the knowledge, resources and ongoing support to do so. I look to the opposition, and what I see is a community full of multiculturalism. Here in Parliament it exists as a token of pride, but that is not the same for Victoria, as in recent years reports of racism have drastically increased. Real change begins with education. We cannot expect teachers to foster multicultural and inclusive classrooms if we fail to provide them with appropriate training. That is exactly why clause 6 is such an essential part of this bill. Clause 6.2 outlines four key areas that every professional development session will address: linguistic inclusion, anti-bias training, resource adaptation and trauma-informed educational practices. These are not just random educational buzzwords; they are real and practical skills that help teachers to recognise any unconscious bias they may hold and respond to the diverse needs of their students. This allows them to create classrooms where every young person feels respected, valued and, most importantly, safe. However, our bill recognises that meaningful change cannot be achieved through a single professional development session. That is why clause 6.3 allows for an ongoing relationship between schools and multicultural organisations. Starting off with a foundation session and continuing through annual intensive training, it will help schools to be supported through every step of the way, requiring schools to develop a multicultural inclusion statement and review it regularly and ensuring that inclusion becomes embedded within school culture rather than remaining a short-term initiative. Our bill understands that belonging is not created by good intentions alone. It is built through commitment and continuous improvement. By investing in our teachers, we invest in our students, and by investing in our students, we empower the next generation.

Sarbjeet SINGH: Sat sri akal – 'hello' in my mother tongue Punjabi. I rise to strongly oppose this bill not because multicultural education does not matter but because this bill only tells half the story. This bill frames multicultural education through Australian history from 1945 to today. But members, let me tell you this, multicultural Australia did not begin in 1945, and inclusion cannot begin halfway through the book. That is like starting a movie in the sequel and pretending you understand the plot. That is not true. Members, before we talk about post-war migration, we must begin with the First People of this land, the oldest continuing cultures on this earth. When we talk about multiculturalism, we must talk about colonialisation, the exclusion, the White Australia policy, the racism, the resistance and the long fight for belonging. Without that foundation, this bill risks teaching students multiculturalism simply arrived on a boat, and that is not true. That is dangerous because if we teach a simplified history, we create a simplified understanding of inclusion. Multiculturalism is not that simple. It is not just curry nights. It is not just flags. And it is not please-bring-a-plate diplomacy. It is power, justice, identity and truth. There is already way too much division in this society, as the speaker just mentioned before. Let us not divide our society further by putting a date to it. You cannot put multiculturalism on a birth certificate and call 1945 its birthday. I urge this chamber to consider it and strongly oppose this flawed bill.

Tehreem LUGMANI: Stigma does not always begin as something loud. Sometimes it begins as a laugh about someone's name, a comment about their accent or a student leaving what makes them them at the school gate just to feel accepted. Clause 7 is not just another clause. It establishes multicultural inclusion as a real subject within the curriculum. The clause introduces a standalone contemporary history subject across years 7 to 10 focusing on Australian history from 1945 onwards. That matters because students cannot understand modern Australia without understanding the past and the migration waves that shaped it. Clause 7 does not vaguely say 'teach diversity' or 'be nice'. It requires students to examine the push factors, the pull factors, migrant contributions and challenges faced by the migrating communities. That means that students learn why people leave their homes, why they come to Australia, what they built here and, unfortunately, the countless barriers that they face once they arrive. This is how stigma is challenged properly: not through slogans and metaphors, but through knowledge. The Speak Out Against Racism study found that over 40 per cent of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and ethnic minority students reported racial discrimination from peers at school, so clearly, pretending students already understand inclusion and that the curriculum is already made is not enough, because clearly the curriculum is not working and has failed us if prejudice is still current in our society. The opposition may say that this creates a curriculum overload, but clause 7 is structured. It recommends – emphasis on 'recommends' – 100 minutes per week of age-appropriate content, because we are

not trying to overwhelm and traumatise the kids, we are trying to educate them and help them understand, with flexible assessments like project-based, reflective and inquiry-based tasks.

Hteemoo YOHELLAYMUSAW: The opposition opposes clause 8 and the creation of the Victorian Cultural Conference, or VICCON. I want to be clear: multiculturalism is one of Victoria's greatest strengths. Cultural awareness, inclusion and intercultural understandings are important goals. But the question before this house is not whether these goals are worthwhile. The question is whether this bill achieves them in a meaningful and efficient way. And frankly, this bill is like bringing a packed lunch to an all-you-can-eat buffet. Victoria already hosts some of the most successful multicultural events in the country that are celebrated across every school. We have Harmony Week. We have Refugee Week. We also have community festivals across the state, and in Geelong, which I represent, we have Pako Festa, Victoria's largest free multicultural street festival, attracting more than 100,000 people every year. These events already showcase cultural food, performances, community stalls, guest speakers and intercultural engagement – the very same things VICCON proposes. So what exactly makes VICCON different? The bill never tells us. Instead, it creates a new board, a new conference, a new administration structure and a new annual event that duplicates programs which already succeed and are operating. Why use our resources reinventing the wheel when the wheel is already rolling? Members of this house, this bill confuses activity with impact. More events do not automatically mean more inclusivity. If we want students engaging with multicultural communities, we should invest in and partner with outstanding events that already exist, not create unneeded copies. This bill is repetitive, redundant and regressive. For these reasons, the opposition urges the house to reject it.

Ayaan ABDULLAH: I want everyone in the room to take a moment and picture this: you are stepping back into your very first day of high school, fuelled with excitement, joy and the eagerness to learn – learn within the safety of the four walls, holding together the utopia of a classroom, learn to grow, learn to earn, learn to be confident. But suddenly those walls come crashing down. How? Why? Where? It all starts with one comment, one stare, one singular act of discrimination that breaks down the lives of thousands of Victorian children. Is this really what we stand for? Is this what our Assembly has fought for? Is this how we represent a multicultural Australia? Classrooms are promised as environments of inclusion or exclusion, but more often than not these classrooms are left as empty promises. So many children undergo discrimination on a daily basis. Let us address the real issue. What is the underlying cause of the problem? This is not because of hatred but a lack of understanding. Kids do not just wake up one day and decide to hate. They are taught it, and that is exactly what we are trying to address. With the inclusion of a cultural expert, in clause 8, students receive practical learning beyond the classroom. What better way to learn about cultures than to see them, experience them and immerse ourselves in the rich history and culture that every single one of us has? This is not beyond reality. The foundation already exists. Students often attend annual careers expos to learn about and experience opportunities. Can they not learn and experience cultures? *(Time expired)*

Erfan RAHIMY: We appreciate the sponsor's stated commitment to multicultural inclusion. We applaud you. But well-meaning does not equal well made, and when we examine this bill the deficiencies are clear. Let us begin with the VMBE: a chairperson, a secretary, a treasurer and numerous non-executive directors. These officials will dictate curriculum, manage conferences, audit teachers and assess KPIs. This massive bureaucracy is centralised power and takes away autonomy from the schools and communities that know their students best. Inclusion will not be designed in boardrooms; it will be built in classrooms – which brings me to the organisation that this board will liaise with. Clause 5 clearly lists Diversitat as one of this board's key partners. Diversitat is no longer in existence; it has been absorbed into Cultura. If that was not known to the sponsors of this bill, that is a concerning reflection of the research that was put into this piece of legislation before it was introduced into this chamber. Let us talk about professional development. Schools who fail to meet criteria will be placed on performance improvement plans, subjected to a 90-day audit and placed under department intervention. Add to that, the reports school will need to produce outline upwards of 10 different components. This is not supported. This is punishment disguised as red tape. The subject of contemporary history will require 100 minutes per week of classroom time along with 20 hours of extra professional learning every year on top of the mountains of work your teacher already does. VICCON – five days for students means parents will have no choice but to fork out money out of pocket or lose 12 hours of classroom time. This bill is bureaucratic, punitive, underfunded and poorly put together. *(Time expired)*

Helel BEIROUTI: You have now heard all about our bill, so let me tell you what motivated it. Australia is one of the most multicultural countries in the world. Current statistics show that 49 per cent of Australians were either born here or they have at least one parent who was born overseas. Although people have come to see this

as a problem that needs fixing, I prefer to see it as what makes this country great. The simple vision that people from all cultures, countries and beliefs can live among each other in peace gives us all hope. Recently the rise of parties such as One Nation has resulted in major discrimination against multicultural communities. This bill allows our next generation to be taught from a young age that a person is not a threat because of their beliefs, because of how they look or how they live. It allows students to learn about different cultures with an open mind, through evidence and tradition rather than what they see on their daily doomscroll. When voting for this bill, we ask the opposition to think of the consequences that come with people's lack of education on cultures: the racism that has emerged and people having lost others because of that lack of education. Think about how peaceful this country would be if people were open to understanding and learning cultures rather than blindly discriminating against them.

Roqya HUSSEINI: I rise today to speak in opposition to clause 7.4(b), which would make history a compulsory subject for students in years 7 to 10. Now, I do not know how many year 10 students wake up thinking, 'I really hope they make another subject compulsory,' yet this is exactly what this course is. While the opposition supports the government's goals on promoting multicultural understanding, we believe this approach comes at the expense of students' choice. By year 10, students already study five compulsory subjects, including English, mathematics, science, physical education and humanities. Humanities already covers significant events such as Australian history, migration, diversity and the world wars that have shaped our multicultural nation. Adding another compulsory subject does not create a greater understanding, it simply adds pressure on students who are already balancing a demanding workload, which will also affect their interest. In year 10 students begin making important decisions about their future, such as choosing subjects that will help them in their future pathways for VCE or VM. Dear youth parliamentarians, multicultural understanding is not about adding another subject to the timetable, it is simply about building relationships and understanding and respecting one another. Education should provide opportunities, not limit them. We should ask what they really need and truly deserve – not tick another box but give them freedom and choice. Remember, choice builds future.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Would anybody else like to speak on the bill?

Zeinab ABDO: I rise to oppose clause 8.3 of this bill. This bill repeatedly tells us it stands for multiculturalism. It tells us that every culture matters, every voice matters, yet when it comes to who is invited, it starts naming favourites. Now, we acknowledge that government schools are the only schools that can be mandated to attend VICCON due to current legislation. That is completely reasonable, but if this bill is truly multicultural, why does it specifically invite Catholic schools yet fail to recognise any other faith-based schools? The bill says Catholic and independent schools will be invited. I had to read that more than once. If this bill is about multiculturalism, why do Catholic schools get a special mention? Were the other faith-based schools accidentally left unread, because unless my copy of the bill is missing a page, I cannot find Islamic schools, Jewish schools, Sikh schools, Hindu schools or Buddhist schools mentioned anywhere. This is not the selective recognition bill. This is the multicultural inclusion bill. The government wants us to believe that this is about equality, yet equality does not require favouritism. If non-government schools are welcome, then simply just say that, because when legislation starts pointing at one group and saying, 'Don't worry, you're invited,' everybody else naturally starts asking, 'What about us?' If a multicultural bill requires people to read between the lines to find themselves, then perhaps the lines were not written very well in the first place. This is not about removing Catholic schools. This is not about diminishing one community. It is about ensuring every community is treated with the same respect. A bill about inclusion should never create unnecessary exclusion. A bill about diversity should never appear selective, and a bill about belonging should never leave people wondering whether they belong at all. The title says 'multicultural'. The wording says 'conditions apply'. Inclusion is not about what walks through the door, it is about who receives the invitation.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Do we have a government member who would like to speak? I call on a government member.

Mahi DESAI: As we can all agree, the lack of multicultural understanding is a problem in today's world. The opposition argues that 100 minutes per week is too long to be learning about multiculturalism. However, they disregard a few things. Firstly, the 100 minutes is a recommended amount of learning, which respects the autonomy of individual schools and principals. This allows them to adapt their school schedule to fit their existing timetables without causing structural chaos. Moreover, by providing structural learning time, it establishes a clear benchmark, giving them enough time to teach the subject with depth and avoid it becoming a

rushed addition. Furthermore, students are not tested on this topic, which allows them to focus on their learning while also understanding multiculturalism to its best. By teaching students this, it fosters social cohesion, empathy and better intercultural citizenship from a young age. Therefore I request that this house support this bill.

Izaan Ahmah SRAMBIYAN: The intentions of this bill are definitely commendable. However, clause 4 reveals a major contradiction in the planning of this bill. The Victorian Board of Multicultural Education is given enormous responsibility. They select multicultural organisations, design curriculum implementation and make recommendations that will directly affect every single Victorian secondary student, yet despite all of this, there is not a single appointed young person on this board. Clause 4.3 lists representatives from the Department of Education, the VCAA, the Victorian Multicultural Association and the History Teachers Association of Victoria. Every seat belongs to adults and institutions. The very people that this board is making decisions about – young people – are not included in that list. If this bill is truly about creating a culturally inclusive education, then the voices of culturally diverse young people should not just be consulted, they should be on the board. They should have a seat at the table where decisions concerning them are made. Multicultural inclusion cannot be achieved by excluding the perspectives of those who experience the education system daily. Their voices must be heard.

Ada OZKAN: Australia is one of the most multicultural nations in the world. As one of the speakers has mentioned, 49 per cent of Australians have at least one parent born overseas, while 27.6 per cent of Australians were born overseas themselves. Our classmates reflect this diversity. This room reflects this diversity. Yet too often students leave school without a meaningful understanding of the cultures, histories and experiences of the people sitting beside them. Migration has shaped modern Australia in countless positive ways. It has enriched our communities, expanded our industries and transformed our national identity. It has also influenced public policy. Laws such as the abolition of the White Australia policy and the introduction of the Racial Discrimination Act 1975 demonstrate Australia's commitment to equality regardless of race or ethnicity. More recently multicultural policies have improved language services, settlement support and protections against discrimination, recognising that diversity is one of Australia's greatest strengths. However, legislation alone cannot create understanding. That begins in our schools. Education is one of the most powerful tools we have to reduce prejudice before it forms. When young people learn about different cultures, faiths and histories in an accurate and respectful way, they develop empathy, challenge stereotypes and become better equipped to participate in an increasingly diverse society. If we expect our generation to continue to build a cohesive, respectful and united Australia, then we must give them the knowledge to do so. Multicultural education should not be an optional extra. It is an essential investment in Australia's future, in our future.

Angus WRIGHT: It is ironic that the government are preaching multiculturalism and inclusivity when they have neglected to include the world's oldest living civilisation in the world. This bill is built on shaky foundations made out of hypocrisy and lies. They have failed to do research, they have failed to engage stakeholders and I would also argue that they have failed to adequately support the numerous culturally diverse communities that breathe life into our great state. Therefore I urge the members of this house to block this bill.

Komal GILL: The opposition mentioned that this bill does not account for multicultural youth voices. The bill was literally written by multicultural youth. The opposition has also stated that the current Victorian curriculum already includes study of migration patterns that have influenced Victorian society. As a house of youth, I urge you to recall your current or not-so-long-ago school years. How strong was this education? How often did you see yourself or your family reflected in the history you were taught? This bill targets this issue specifically. The opposition has questioned why this education should not be added to current history subjects. Adding to the existing subjects would simply overcrowd them. This would inflict lack of engagement and work against aims to promote multicultural education. Another point I would like to raise is a key principle we are taught in schools throughout Victoria: racism. If racism is grown through education, then the way to overcome it must also be through education. Multicultural education through multimodal means will enable engaging and accessible exposure to the society we live in. This bill enables understanding. Understanding enables acceptance. Acceptance enables societal cohesion. In the same way that schools must keep up with society, so too should the subjects and history we are taught. This bill is crucial for our future, and so we must vote yes for this bill.

Cecilia XU: I must question the entire existence of clause 8, which proposes the well-intentioned yet unrealistic Victorian Cultural Conference. Clause 8.3(a) mandates all government secondary school students in

years 7 to 10 to participate. I wonder, has the government even considered the feasibility of this proposal? Have they considered the amount of applicable schools in Victoria? How many students are in each year level? If we times these numbers together, we will find that it is simply impossible to accommodate all of these students across the five-day period proposed in clause 8.6(a). What venue will be big enough to host this? How long will each school stay at the conference – one day, the full week? None of these crucial details are even mentioned in the bill. How can we support an event that does not even prove to be able to run smoothly or at all? Overall, cultural inclusion should not be reduced to a five-day expo. Consider clause 8.4, which outlines the contents of the conference – food stalls and cultural performances. Where are the mentions of the prevalent deeper issues of racism, belonging and safety that remain unresolved? This conference is just a heavily romanticised, unfeasible and unrealistic excuse for multicultural representation.

Barnaby TRIMBLE: A problem exists, and we know it. Before the opposition goes and starts nitpicking the grammar and logistics of this bill, sit and think of its true role. Why not bridge the gap between culture and knowledge for all immigrants, for all the discriminated against children and for all communities? At the end of the day, we all come from different corners of the earth, yet everyone here is Australian. So it is time we start acting united rather than separate.

Vishnu EASWAR: I would like to begin by drawing everyone's attention again to clause 8. The government establishes the Victorian Cultural Conference, or in other words VICCON. The government states that VICCON shall promote cultural awareness, inclusion and intercultural understanding. Do not get us wrong, we absolutely support spreading multiculturalism. However, the government in clause 8.3(b) states that only Catholic schools are invited to operate with VICCON. So I ask: what about other religious schools? My second issue about this clause is how only private and independent schools are invited to operate with VICCON. If the government really cares about multiculturalism, then all schools must be included. So why not make it compulsory? Finally, VICCON is restricted to years 7 to 10. Is the government seriously suggesting that cultural understanding suddenly becomes irrelevant in years 11 and 12? Existing multicultural events welcome people of all ages and backgrounds, creating genuine community connections rather than another compulsory school excursion.

Marlee McGRATH: The opposition has raised concerns about where the schools will find time to train our teachers and how the bill does not have a rigid set time to do this. What the opposition has failed to consider is that no two schools are the same. No two schools schedule the same way. Assuming otherwise would be simply ignorant. By having fluidity on how this is applied, schools can effectively teach their staff, allowing them to effectively teach their students. I would also like to bring up the absurd claim that the opposition has brought up – that year 10 humanities classes are adequately teaching multiculturalism. Did I miss a class, because I do not remember learning this to any effective degree. I ask the opposition to actually be realistic.

Livia Sum Yi WONG: The intention behind clause 7 is admirable, yet as a passionate history student, I would like to point out the immaturity of this clause. Firstly, the timeframe of 1945 onwards is unjustified. Not only does it not cover the full context of migration since the First Fleet, but according to the general rule for historical studies, the content has to be something that was more than 10 years ago. Will new immigration waves be covered? Will new immigration be cared about under the syllabus, such as why I moved from Hong Kong to Australia in 2022? Will anyone care? My point is that immigration is a continuous and dynamic movement and topic in Australia, and its complexity cannot be simply condensed within 1945 to 2016, and therefore it should not simply be a history subject. It cannot be reduced to a history subject.

Secondly, as the famous historian EH Carr once said, history is inseparable from the historian. In the landscape of rising extremism and resentment towards immigrant communities, who can ensure this new course and new design is more accurate than the current ones? Who can ensure that it is representative in terms of the historical evidence, the historical interpretation and perspectives constructed in both the design and the delivery of these courses? I am aware that in clause 7.3(b) consultation will be undertaken with multicultural groups. However, to what extent will multicultural groups' opinions be considered? Who is to monitor to what extent this will be covered? These are all unanswered questions by the bill, and there is no third power. There is not another authority to guarantee this. This is exactly why we demand an answer to this before we can possibly agree with this bill. They also tell us that the 100 minutes is merely a recommended time. Then what about the minimum? Are they implying that schools can get away with simply teaching maybe 10 minutes of this subject, because they are not even getting assessed on the subject? I urge the Assembly to reconsider this bill.

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

Talal NAVEED: My fellow parliamentarians, after hearing the opposition's first speech, I began to plan an apology in this right of reply for the misnaming, until I realised that I am writing an apology to a multicultural initiative group, and hardly was the importance of multicultural education emphasised during the refuters' speeches. So I apologise if this is stubborn of me, but I do not owe an apology to an organisation that fails to self-regulate their morality when faced with a small conflict of interest.

Additionally, the opposition places a strong emphasis on the workload of teachers. While I understand the concern, the fact of the matter is teachers' workload can be distributed, but the bias and prejudice that we risk leaving to rot in our students' minds – this cannot be mitigated except by empathy and understanding.

The opposition mentioned that our bill fails to recognise the oldest civilisation, but the premise of multiculturalism is equality and not placing importance on a society simply based on its age. Let me be clear: if Victoria's current multicultural initiatives were sufficient, then less than three weeks ago I would not have been hearing stories from my younger siblings about how people at school are calling each other dirty Pakis or shamelessly saying 'Eff Palestine'. And so I ask you, my fellow parliamentarians, what kind of education teaches students about everything except the person sitting next to them? How can we celebrate diversity in our slogans but neglect it in our classrooms? If multiculturalism is one of Victoria's greatest strengths, then why shouldn't it be one of our greatest lessons? What are we afraid of – understanding one another? Who loses when young Victorians learn empathy? If not now, then when? If not us, then who? My fellow parliamentarians, when our future generations ask, 'What did this house say to ignorance and discrimination?', what will we reply with?

The ACTING SPEAKER: The question is:

That the Multicultural Inclusion Education in Secondary School Curricula Bill 2026 be now read a second and a third time.

House divided on motion:

Ayes	32
Noes	17
Majority in favour	15

Motion agreed to.

Read second time.

Read third time.

The ACTING SPEAKER: I get to say a few words. We are running very short of time, and I am very sorry, first of all, to those who did not get to speak. We have got another debate at 11 am, so I would love to hear from all of you. There might be a little bit of time during the break if you would like to come back in, and I am happy to sit and listen to those who did not get a chance to speak. Also, I apologise for the mispronunciation of so many names. What I love about this room is that it represents Australia as it is. We all have to get better at pronouncing names.

I am not supposed to have an opinion, but I got very caught up in the debate. You guys did such an awesome job. It made it very hard to remember what my job was up here, because normally I am sitting over there listening to the debate and getting as involved as you guys did. What I loved the most, though, was hearing from this side. I have never heard that before. What I also loved was seeing people vote with their conscience and vote for the bill from different sides of the house. Those who spoke against the bill, though, did a really good job. Whilst many of you probably agree with the sentiment of the bill, it is really hard to do the job and speak against a bill that you believe in, but you did that really well. You picked on clauses rather than the intent of the bill to make the bill better. The Westminster system is the best we have in the world and is great for democracy, but I do think we can do it better. I would love to see us use more of the talent in the room always and have those opinions and actually make policy better. Unfortunately, the way it works at the moment is we

do not do a lot of that. But we have got all these young people coming through. There is a lot of us who believe that we can make the way we do things better.

The other thing I just want to comment on is the respect you had for each other in the room. I get quite embarrassed when schoolkids come in here for question time, because I do not think it is the best of adult behaviour and I think you would not get away with that at school. There is also a lot of room for how we could improve and encourage people to get involved in politics. I am really, really pleased to see you guys involved, engaged and interested in politics, because it is critical for our future as a country. Thank you for letting me chair, really badly, today. It was a real pleasure to be here with you. Thank you.

Sitting suspended 10:30 am until 11:01 am.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Ellen Sandell): Welcome, everyone. Hi. It is so good to have you in the building. I will introduce myself and then we will get straight into the proceedings. My name is Ellen Sandell. I am the member for Melbourne. That means you are in my electorate right now. The electorate of Melbourne covers the CBD, Docklands, East Melbourne, Carlton, North Melbourne, West Melbourne, Parkville and out to Kensington, where I live – so all the real inner-city suburbs north of the river. I represent the Greens party and I am also the Leader of the Greens. I have been in Parliament – this will be my 12th year now – for almost three terms. I sit up the back here, so you have got the pleasure of sitting in my seat behind you. Yes, that is my seat. You are in a lucky spot. Many of you will know that the Greens hold a number of seats in the Victorian Parliament. Obviously the Labor Party is in power at the moment and usually sits on this side, and the Liberal–Nationals coalition is the opposition. The Greens have three members of this lower house, and we have four members of the upper house, where we have shared balance of power. Often the government needs our vote to pass legislation, so we have had some pretty interesting experiences over the last few years having that shared balance of power and have been able to pass some important pieces of legislation.

My background is primarily in climate and environment policy. I am in the Greens and started my career as a scientist but pretty quickly realised that climate change was one of the biggest threats to young people's future and I wanted to make a difference on climate change. I have worked in government policy, I have worked leading a national climate change non-profit organisation and I have also worked in science. Ultimately, I realised that in order to make change we not only need great scientists and great people working behind the scenes but we also need some politicians who are going to make the right decisions for our future, so that is why I went into politics. It is wonderful to see all your shining faces this morning, and I cannot wait for the debate. Today we are debating a bill to strengthen the rights and representation of children in care. We will start with the first reading. You will have to bear with me. This is my first time in the Speaker's chair in 12 years, so I might not get everything right. I am sure you will tell me if I do not. I call upon the sponsor of the bill.

Strengthening Representation for Children in Care Bill 2026

Sponsor: CREATE Foundation

Refuter: Overnewton Anglican Community College

Introduction and first reading

Crystal COMPTON-ROBINS: I move:

That the bill be now read a first time.

Read first time.

Second reading

Crystal COMPTON-ROBINS: I move:

That the bill be now read a second time.

I am here today to introduce the Strengthening Representation for Children in Care Bill 2026. I would first like to acknowledge Zoe Franklin for her work in developing this bill and the lead speech. Throughout this debate there are mentions of the experiences of and barriers faced by children and young people in out-of-home care. If anyone wishes to leave, please do so now.

This bill is founded on a simple but powerful principle: children and young people in out-of-home care deserve to be heard, supported and empowered in every decision that affects their lives. Too often young people in care have experienced decisions being made about them without them being meaningfully included. They face barriers in education, challenges in accessing support services, stigma from their peers and uncertainty when transitioning to adulthood. While many dedicated professionals work tirelessly to support them, the system remains fragmented and inconsistent. This bill seeks to change that. At the heart of this legislation is the establishment of the Voices for Children in Care Board. This board will ensure that the lived experiences of children and young people in care are recognised as expertise and embedded in policy development, service design and government decision-making. Importantly, the board will introduce care-experienced members whose voices will help guide reforms and improve accountability across the sector.

The first core objective of this bill is representation. We believe that young people in care should not simply be consulted occasionally but should have an ongoing and meaningful role in shaping the systems that affect them. Through annual reviews, youth consultation mechanisms and direct advice to government the board will create a permanent platform for these voices to be heard.

The second objective is education and awareness. This bill introduces mandatory care experience training for educators, support workers and professionals who work with young people. The training will be co-designed by care-experienced young people and focus on trauma-informed practice, cultural safety, disability inclusion, mental health awareness and understanding of the diverse experiences of children in care. This bill also establishes educational programs for young people across Victoria. By increasing awareness of out-of-home care and challenging harmful stereotypes we can reduce stigma, build empathy and create more inclusive communities where care-experienced young people feel understood and respected.

The third objective is targeted educational support. Education is one of the strongest predictors of long-term wellbeing, yet care-experienced young people continue to experience poorer educational outcomes than their peers. To address this the bill requires every school to appoint a designated support teacher. These trained professionals will act as advocates, mentors and coordinators, ensuring that students in care receive consistent support and that challenges outside the classroom do not become barriers to success within it.

The fourth objective is the continuity of support and connection. Many young people leaving care are expected to navigate housing, education, employment, healthcare and financial responsibilities with limited support. This bill establishes tailored connections and mentoring programs through dedicated support connectors. These workers will provide practical supports such as guidance, advocacy and mentorship, helping young people access services, achieve their goals and transition successfully into independence.

The expected impacts of this bill are significant. We expect to see stronger representation of children and young people in policy decisions, we expect greater understanding of care experiences among professionals and the wider community, we expect improved educational engagement and outcomes for students in care and we expect better coordination between government agencies and service providers, but most importantly we expect young people leaving care to have stronger support networks, improved wellbeing and greater opportunities to thrive. Ultimately, this legislation is about more than creating programs or establishing a board; it is about recognising the value, dignity and potential of every child and young person in care. It is about ensuring that their voices are not only heard but respected and acted upon. This bill is not just about policy, it is about people. It is about children and young people who have experienced foster care, kinship care and residential care and the challenges that come with navigating a system that often speaks for them instead of listening to them.

As members of the CREATE team many of us bring lived experience of out-of-home care. We have seen the strengths of the system, but we have also experienced the gaps, the barriers and the moments when our voices were overlooked. This bill is the result of those experiences. It is a call for a system that listens, values and empowers young people in care. We know these reforms can make a difference because they reflect what young people in care have been asking for all along. This bill represents an investment in some of Victoria's most vulnerable young people and a commitment to building a care system that is more responsive, inclusive and effective.

The ACTING SPEAKER: I call upon the refuter.

Isaiah JAYASOORIYA: The opposition puts forward this bill as a way to improve the lives of children and young people in care. While we acknowledge that the intention behind this bill is clearly positive, good intentions alone do not automatically result in good legislation. For a bill like this to actually work, it needs to be clear, practical and realistic. Unfortunately, this bill does not meet these standards in several key areas. It creates overlapping roles, places heavy and sometimes unclear expectations on workers, leaves key terms undefined, creates confusion around decision-making and raises concerns around privacy.

Today my team will explain why these issues make the bill difficult to implement and why it should not be supported in its current form. One of the first issues in this bill is the confusion caused by overlapping responsibilities. The bill proposes that the Voices for Children in Care Board is responsible for oversight, advice, consultation and advocacy. At the same time, designated support teachers, child protection services and schools are all assigned similar roles. With so many people expected to support and advocate for the same child, it becomes unclear who is actually responsible for what. Instead of creating clarity, it risks creating confusion. My teammates will go into more detail on how this weakens effective support.

Another concern is the unrealistic expectations put on staff. Under clause 9 support connectors are expected to coordinate services, advocate for young people, develop individual plans, monitor progress and report back to the board. These are significant responsibilities that require time, training and resources. However, the bill does not explain how this workload is meant to be managed in practice.

A further issue is the clear lack of definitions and guidance throughout the bill. Terms such as ‘meaningful involvement’ and ‘reasonable timeframe’ are used but never properly defined. The board is also given responsibilities without clear direction on how they are to be carried out. This leaves room for inconsistent interpretation. This lack of clarity can become a serious weakness in this bill. Additionally, there is also uncertainty around decision-making when children’s wishes differ from professional advice. The bill states that children’s contributions should be given equal weight to professional and academic expertise. While it is important that young people are heard, the bill does not set out how disagreements are meant to be resolved.

Finally, the bill does not adequately address privacy and confidentiality. It includes mentoring programs and reporting requirements but provides very little detail about how sensitive information will be protected or who can access it. For vulnerable children, these safeguards need to be clearly set out, not left vague. While this bill is well intentioned, it ultimately creates more problems than it solves. It introduces new roles without clear boundaries, places unrealistic demands on staff, creates uncertainty and fails to properly protect young people. Throughout this debate our team will show why these issues weaken the bill and why a more workable solution is needed. For these reasons, we urge the house to reconsider this bill.

Golbarg MASTOURI: I think this house would agree that no decision about a person’s life should ever be made without that person’s input, yet for children and young people in out-of-home care that has too often been the reality. We are surrounded by systems designed to protect us, but rarely are we given the genuine power to shape those systems. We are asked to trust institutions that have never truly stopped to ask what we actually need, at least not without us being tokenised in the process.

This is not an isolated issue. According to the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, almost 45,000 children and young people were living in out-of-home care across Australia in 2024, with many spending years in the system. For tens of thousands of young people these systems are not just temporary, they shape their childhoods. That is exactly why clauses 4 and 5 of our bill establish the Voices for Children in Care Board. This is not simply another government committee. Clause 4 deliberately brings together experts in child welfare, education, law, mental health and public policy alongside at least two people with lived experience of care. Why? Because qualifications tell us how systems are designed to work, and lived experience tells us how they actually work. By requiring the board to monitor outcomes, conduct annual reviews, consult directly with young people and publicly report to the minister, these clauses transform accountability from an aspiration into an obligation. They create something our care system desperately needs and right now desperately lacks: accountability. Because good intentions alone do not improve lives.

Meanwhile, clause 5 makes one thing unmistakably clear: every recommendation, every policy and every decision must place the best interests of children and young people first. It recognises that every young person

deserves safety, stability, education, good health, wellbeing and community, while acknowledging that every experience of care is different and that many children and young people in care live with the lasting impacts of trauma. Whether a young person is Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander, culturally diverse, living with disability or part of the LGBTQIA community, they deserve a system that sees their whole identity, not just their case file.

Barnaby TRIMBLE: While I acknowledge the positive intentions behind this bill, this does not automatically make good legislation. This bill contains several unclear definitions: terms such as ‘barriers’ and ‘reasonable timeframe’ are never expanded upon, leaving schools and service providers to interpret the law differently. Legislation should provide certainty, not confusion. Definitions and understanding are crucial parts of good bills, while the gaps in knowledge that are contained in this one may threaten the ability of the bill to achieve its full goal. The bill also creates unnecessary overlap by introducing new roles and responsibilities without clearly explaining how they fit alongside existing case managers and support services. Instead of streamlining support, it risks adding more complexity where it is not needed. Finally, the board is expected to take on an enormous range of responsibilities, yet the bill provides no clear implementation plan or resources to ensure the duties can actually be carried out. These regions show that there are clear flaws with this bill and that further consideration is necessary on how it will be used in order for it to be effective in modern day, contemporary society. I truly believe that in the future this bill should pass, but further review is needed for it to make the impact it needs.

Pranav BALASUBRAMANIAM: The intention of this bill is to provide children and young people in out-of-home care with their personal voices and consultations in regard to this care. However, it is also important to recognise that educators support people, and professionals must be equipped with the appropriate knowledge and training in order to engage with these individuals. Clause 6 assures us that for many children and young people in care, relationships with adults are already incredibly complex. Trust is not automatic. It is something that has been broken, rebuilt and tested time and time again. If another important adult in their lives is not equipped to respond appropriately, another opportunity for connection can be lost – loss of a mentorship, loss of a community, loss of support and oftentimes the loss of knowing that there is someone in your corner who meets you where you are. This clause does not just simply ask for professionals to care. It ensures that they have the skills to care effectively, and without that training, even the best intentions can unintentionally deepen mistrust and trauma. By requiring mandatory care experience informed training, professionals will gain a comprehensive understanding of the different forms of out-of-home care, the lasting impacts of trauma and the unique social, cultural and personal factors that shape each young person’s experiences. Follow-up assessments and a combination of face-to-face workshops will ensure that a consistent standard of care is established across Victoria. Just like how we respect the identities of everyone in this house by asking for their preferred pronouns, the history and past experiences of these young people need to be acknowledged. Yes, clause 6 may be harsh, but educators and professionals should treat their students with the respect and attention that they deserve. I strongly urge the house to pass the bill if they truly aim and aspire to improve the lives of young people in Victoria.

Laura ORD-HUME: While we acknowledge the compassion behind this bill, compassion alone is not enough. Good legislation must also be practical, efficient and, above all, clear. Clause 4 does the opposite. This clause establishes the Voices for Children in Care Board and gives it an incredibly broad range of responsibilities. It is expected to oversee policies, advise government, monitor outcomes, deliver education, review services, create mentoring programs and represent the voices of children in care. At first glance this proposal appears comprehensive. However, a closer examination of this bill reveals a significant flaw. Many of these responsibilities are already assigned elsewhere. The bill introduces designated support teachers, support connectors, case managers and child protection services to existing government departments. Every one of these roles is expected to advocate for children, coordinate services, communicate with agencies and improve outcomes. So I ask the opposition: who is actually responsible? If a young person is falling through the cracks, do they turn to their support connector, their designated support teacher, their case manager or this new board? And if those groups disagree, who holds the final authority? Clause 4 never answers these questions. Instead of simplifying an already complex care system, this bill risks creating another layer of bureaucracy where responsibilities overlap, accountability becomes blurred and vulnerable young people are left navigating an even more confusing system. Even more concerning is that this board would perform many of the same functions and responsibilities already carried out by existing departments and advisory bodies. Rather than simplifying the system, this bill adds another layer of administration, increasing complexity instead of

improving coordination. Children in care do not need committees, they need clear pathways, timely support and services that work together without confusion. Effective legislation should remove barriers, not create them.

Sara SULTANA: I rise to speak in support of clause 7 of the Strengthening Representation for Children in Care Bill 2026. For many children and young people in out-of-home care one of the greatest challenges is not simply navigating the care system itself; it is navigating the misunderstanding, assumptions and stigma that often surround it. People cannot support experiences they do not understand. Ignorance breeds stigma, stigma breeds isolation and isolation only compounds the challenges that many young people in care already face. That is why this clause establishes a comprehensive education program designed to build awareness, empathy and understanding of care experiences across our communities. Importantly, this program will not be created about young people in care without them. It will be co-designed and where appropriate delivered by people with lived experience of out-of-home care, because while professional expertise tells us how our care system operates, lived experiences tell us what it actually feels like to grow up in it. Effective education requires both of these things.

The program will primarily be delivered in secondary schools while also extending into primary schools, community organisations, sporting clubs and online spaces. Through workshops, discussions, presentations and digital resources it will reach young people where they already learn, connect and build relationships. Education is one of the most powerful tools we have to reduce stigma because it changes culture before it changes policy. By teaching respectful language, recognising the diversity and intersectionality of care experiences and showing young people how to be allies to their peers we are creating communities where care-experienced young people are met with understanding rather than judgement. This clause also recognises that education should never become outdated. By requiring the program to be regularly reviewed and updated we ensure it continues to reflect the changing needs, voices and experiences of children and young people in care. Members of this house, this clause is about far more than providing information, because changing a system means changing the culture that surrounds it.

Chloe ORD-HUME: While we all absolutely agree that children and young people in out-of-home care deserve better support, this bill places unrealistic expectations on the actual workers it relies on in order to achieve its goals. Throughout Victoria teachers and case managers along with support staff already manage overwhelming workloads, yet this bill constantly adds more mandatory responsibilities without considering whether these workers actually have the time, staffing or resources to effectively carry out their role. For example, every designated support teacher is expected to complete mandatory training, undertake additional specialised modules, conduct fortnightly wellbeing check-ins, coordinate with child protection services, communicate with principals and case managers, organise tutoring, manage administrative tasks and advocate for students across multiple areas. While each of those responsibilities are important on their own, expecting one staff member to undergo all of these duties along with their existing teaching workload is simply unrealistic.

The same issue arises with mandatory training of all professionals working with children and young people. Not only must they complete intense training but they are also expected to attend an interview after to prove their understanding, renew the training every three years and then face barriers to completing their work if they have not finished it. This creates additional pressure on the workers, and it could potentially reduce workforce efficiency rather than strengthen it. Good policy should empower professionals, not overwhelm them. If staff work too hard there is a real risk that these requirements become a compulsory exercise instead of providing meaningful support for young people. The opposition has created a bill with admirable intentions, but intentions alone are not enough. Without addressing the practical limitations faced by workers involved this legislation risks creating expectations that simply cannot be met.

Joel SMITH: I ask you all: who do you turn to when you need support? We all need someone to go to. This is why in clause 8 we are calling for a designated support teacher, a specialised, dedicated professional focusing on academic support for young people in care. They do not receive enough support at home with homework from their carers, especially in care settings such as residential care. Carers are often dealing with complex needs and cannot support to the best of their abilities. Designated support teachers will also focus on reintegrating those students at risk of not completing their education back into the classroom. Three in four students with a care experience will never finish their education. I was almost one of them. I want all students to succeed – most importantly, those with a care experience.

Komal GILL: This bill provides insightful solutions to strengthening representation of children in out-of-home care. However, certain proposals within this bill require more clarity to provide the most accommodating support for our community's most vulnerable children. Focusing on vulnerability, the opposition has not clearly defined how vulnerability is to be interpreted. In clause 5 the bill recognises the transition from care as a critical period of vulnerability, requiring continuity of support beyond the age of 18. But how long do the support beyond 18 programs last? Who determines when this critical period of vulnerability begins and ends? Looking over clause 4, subclause 4.4 outlines that the VCCB shall be responsible for collecting and storing data concerned with feedback and evidence of ongoing care. This clause lacks reference to a concern for child safety. Who shall be held responsible for guaranteeing confidentiality of evidence regarding minors? Who shall be held responsible if the VCCB fails to protect children's confidentiality? Clause 4 clearly demonstrates a lack of clarity, restraining the bill's ability to execute its plans if passed.

Talking about a lack of clarity, clause 9 fails to address the manner in which feedback from young people shall be obtained. Many children in care are extremely young and vulnerable. It would be harmful to prioritise their representation at the cost of their innocence. Suppose a representative of the VCCB meets a young child experiencing out-of-home care. Suppose they approach them in an aggressive manner to demand their statements for feedback. Not only would the child's statement be swayed due to being overwhelmed, but also their mental wellbeing may be negatively impacted. In strengthening representation of children in out-of-home care, the question arises of whether child welfare is being prioritised or jeopardised. Clearly, the opposition has presented an excellent idea, but they fail to demonstrate a plan for execution, pushing us as the government to wonder if this bill is all but a dream.

Harmony HARRIS: Young people within the care system are expected to reach out to many services to help them in different areas of their life, such as housing, health, education and wellbeing. Most of these young people are forced to seek out these services on their own; advocating for themselves daily whilst balancing school instability is exhausting. They are expected to show the same level of engagement as other young people whilst carrying the weight of adult admin tasks that most parents would do for their children. This program addresses the issue in three key ways. It takes the burden off of young people to do all their life admin outlined in clause 9.2(b). This allows them to focus on things such as education, provides consistency for young people and allows for clear understanding so that everyone is on the same page. Young people take on a massive burden of unnecessary life admin. This support connector helps solve this.

Ada OZKAN: I am sure everybody in this chamber agrees with the idea that children and young people in care deserve to have their voices heard. Their lived experiences are incredibly valuable and should inform decisions that affect them. However, this bill creates uncertainty by failing to explain how these voices are balanced with professional expertise when they conflict. Clause 5.3(b) states that contributions from children and young people in care must be given equal weight. In matters involving child safety, mental health or legal protection professionals are trained to assess risk and make decisions based on evidence. If a child's wishes directly conflict with expert advice, the bill does not provide any framework for resolving that disagreement. Therefore who makes the final decision? This uncertainty is further reinforced in clause 5.2(d), which states that the views of the child should be considered where appropriate. But who determines what is appropriate? Without clear guidance this phrase is left open to interpretation, risking inconsistent decisions across differing cases. The bill also promotes self-determination as a guiding principle, yet clause 8.4 requires mandatory fortnightly check-ins between designated support teachers and students in care. If self-determination is truly valued, why are these meetings compulsory regardless of whether the young person feels comfortable participating? Children deserve to be listened to, but they also deserve decisions that are clear and consistent. Rather than placing lived experience and professional expertise in competition, this bill should provide a framework that allows both to be considered together. This is why in its current form we cannot support this piece of legislation.

Livia Sum Yi WONG: I would like to prove this bill's importance from the perspective of someone who is unfamiliar with children in care. Clause 7 provides holistic education for all young people in an overview of out-of-home care, in clause 7.5(a), as well as how to be a supportive peer and ally, in clause 7.5(f). This is currently lacking, yet it is an extremely important aspect of education which is often overlooked. For example, in my five years of secondary education in Victoria I have never received any training in any shape or form regarding how to support children who are in out-of-home care. Even if I had all the heart and all the passion to do so, I have extremely limited information on what is appropriate to say, hence leading me and many of my

peers to stay unwillingly silent. They argue that the consequence of educating students in this is that teachers will bear an overwhelming amount of workload.

I urge everyone to take a good look at clause 8. The main responsibilities of the DST are, firstly, to complete modules in taking action, not an output; and secondly, a fortnightly check-in with students in need, which at most would take probably one recess every fortnight – how is that a big burden? Thirdly, it is to support the communication and modification of workloads for these out-of-home care children. This really depends on individual circumstances and occasions; hence it is not a regular burden that teachers have to face. Also, what burden do teachers have in simply granting them an extension for a few days? When we have teachers also having other roles – for equality, for reconciliation, for environmental awareness – why has out-of-home care suddenly become an overwhelming burden for these teachers but not these other roles? The opposition has to explain this contradiction. Clause 7 is genuinely innovative, new and important content that all of us deserve to be informed of in our secondary school education. I urge the Assembly to vote for this bill.

Tehreem LUGMANI: I would like to reiterate what the government has said countless times: we want to strengthen representation and support for children in care. It is deeply important that that is understood as we do care about this topic. However, the teaching workload, pressure on workers and the practical implications as promised would do more harm to children than good. We do not want children to suffer more than they already do. As the opposition stated, good intention does not save lives.

Thomas CURKOWSKYJ: I just want to start by saying that we do absolutely need support teachers, and we need them because, for children in care, their case managers often do not show up. A lot of these kids do not actually know who their case managers are, because they do not get enough experience with them. I want to add another thing. The members opposite, the government, suggested that this would be too hard for teachers. It might be it might not be easy, but it is the right thing to do. If we want the right results for our students, we need to put in a little bit of extra effort. One last thing before I go: I think that we should really take into consideration the fact that this bill was written for people in care by people in care. It was not made by some agency or some consultancy group. It was made by people with lived experiences. I think they know what works and what does not.

Mahi DESAI: As we can all agree, this bill identifies a very important topic that needs to be recognised. The intentions behind this bill are very fair; however, there is a lack of workload management for the support teachers. The support teachers are drowning in responsibilities with training and the care of young, vulnerable individuals. The opposition argues that this bill is made to ensure young individuals in care are heard and given a chance at large opportunities. However, what would happen to a child if a support teacher left the educational institution they were put in? Where do they go? Who do they go to? When are they supplied with adequate support? These questions are not answered within the bill. The young individuals deserve someone that they can talk to that they trust. Who can guarantee that the support teachers will adequately spend enough time with these young individuals? These questions still stand.

Charlotte FLEMING: I stand to bring attention to the importance of clause 9. Clause 9 establishes the support connector program. This program enables children in care to voluntarily connect with an individual whose role it is to do exactly as the name suggests – support. By helping these young people manage the overwhelming environment around them, they allow for these young people to focus more on themselves and their futures. I wish for the government to see how this program gives vulnerable people a person to go to for support, a person who is dedicated to supporting their future. By providing this support, young people are enabled to actually think about their wider future further than their current moment and situation.

Peyton CROFT: Pressing children to speak about their experience and trauma can potentially cause harm to them. The government cannot support a bill which may cause innocent children harm. Additionally, some children do not have the capacity to express and communicate their emotions and experiences, especially in ways that will genuinely help them receive care. This bill does not account for this issue.

Angus WRIGHT: The government will never truly understand the barriers, hardships and isolation that children in care face. Nor will I. But that provides us as members of the house with an opportunity – an opportunity to reflect, an opportunity to demand lasting, impactful changes to a broken system that fails to adequately support the people that it is designed to protect. So to the opposition, I ask this: do you feel proud of yourselves for spitting on the faces of Victoria's most vulnerable children and then slamming the doors of

prosperity and fulfilment when they have rightfully earned the privilege to walk through them? Members of the house, it is about damn time that our state's children in care finally get the decency and respect that they deserve.

The ACTING SPEAKER: I remind members about parliamentary language.

Helel BEIROUTI: I would like to turn everyone's attention to clause 6.5(b). I would like to say that requiring police checks for professionals is completely unnecessary. There are so many people in this world that grew up and made the wrong decisions in their lives. When they talk about police checks, they do not talk about what they are looking for. Okay, if we are talking about a rapist, yes, for sure – let us not give him a job. But what are you looking for in these police checks? We need to make sure that those who are looking for second chances in their lives are getting them.

Evangeline FLYNN: I would like to address some of the concerns raised by the government concerning the overlapping of responsibilities between case managers and designated support teachers, as outlined in clause 8. I think the most important difference between these two roles is simply that teachers in roles of designated support are internal advocates. They are solely concentrated on the fulfilment of education of designated young children in care, whereas the case managers are largely responsible for broader coordination within the legal system. I would also like to stress the fact that these teachers being designated to give support to in-care children is fulfilled on an expression-of-interest basis. Therefore all arguments from the government saying that teachers have too much of a workload are void, given that these positions are self-nominated.

I would just like to continue on by stressing the importance of having a healthy and supportive school environment for children who are in care. Staying in school ensures that these children have the opportunity to pursue professional pathways that will give them fulfilment later in life and support their lifestyle and basic cost of living. It fights isolation, ensuring that they have a sense of community connection, and it provides continuity when at home there may be instability and lots of movement. I strongly commend this bill and specifically commend clause 8 and the introduction of designated support teachers.

Ayaan ABDULLAH: The opposition has mentioned how teachers are not the primary issue here and that case managers are. So why are they focusing so much of this bill's attention on teachers rather than addressing the real underlying problem of case managers? Why don't we address that first? Why don't we make them fulfil their jobs effectively so that children in out-of-home care do not have to rely on teachers? Why don't we make it so that they can do their jobs effectively without having to rely on other staff or burdening them with unnecessary administration?

Zeinab ABDO: I would like to outline that the ambiguity of some of the definitions is due to the uniqueness of each young person's situation. Every situation is not a linear line. Vulnerability can look different in various people, and we must not generalise our at-risk youth who crucially need representation. So I push this house to do right by children in care and pass legislation that will truly benefit them and echo their perspectives.

Mannat SRIVASTAVA: We admit that this bill is very important and crucial for protecting young children. However, I do not believe that it properly outlines confidentiality. For example, if a child shares any information when trying to reach out for help, how confidential will this information be? How will a teacher know or anyone know that this should be shared onwards or be kept a secret? This has not been specified in the bill.

Rahul DOLOI: The government opened with their biggest concern: contributions from young people in care must be given equal weight regarding their professional careers. I would like to remind the government that equal does not equal overarching or majority weight. Rather it is a reminder, a decency to hear from all those that are involved. How does it make sense when a child's future career is in the balance that the child is robbed of meaningful deliberation on a life-altering decision? The government worries about circumstances where the young person's interests conflict with the Voices for Children in Care Board's advice. It seems that the government only knows the concept of right and wrong and black and white. They argue that grey is not a colour, but we argue that grey is a shade. It is in this area where decisions are made that benefit all parties involved and that ensure that youth can acknowledge professional advice while being rooted in reality as they pursue their dreams. The fact that youth being given equal weight is a deal breaker is inconceivable. If they disagree, I say good. It shows active participation in nothing other than their own lives.

Sarbjee SINGH: I would just like to address the Premier's comment previously, and I would like to draw the house's attention to clause 6, particularly clause 6.5. The title of the clause very clearly says 'Education for Professionals'. The police check is for the professionals who provide care and education to children – the educators who are to support people and are professionals – and I think it is very common sense that they are required to produce police checks.

Arisha PRASAD: Definitions are broad to account for various situations. The interpretations will vary significantly, leaving room for errors and potential harm or mistreatment for the children that are in orphanages.

Erfan RAHIMY: The government asked what happens if a stable adult leaves. That is exactly why we have support connect workers and DSTs, as well as the community. There are other people who can always be there. I understand it can be hard. You might get attached to some people, but there always will be someone with a similar situation.

Crystal COMPTON-ROBINS: I would like to begin by thanking all members who have contributed to today's debate on the Strengthening Representation for Children in Care Bill 2026. Throughout this debate we have heard discussion about the practicality of these reforms, the responsibilities placed on schools and professionals and the resources required to implement these initiatives. These are important considerations, and we welcome the opportunity to examine them. However, we must also ask ourselves a more important question: what is the cost of doing nothing? For too long children and young people in care have experienced systems that are fragmented, inconsistent, and often fail to listen to those that they are designed to support. The educational gaps, the lack of coordinated support, the challenges faced when leaving care and the stigma surrounding care experiences are not hypothetical problems. They are real issues affecting real people every day. This bill does not propose a radical overhaul of the system. Rather, it strengthens existing supports by ensuring they are coordinated, informed by lived experience and focusing on long-term outcomes. It creates accountability, promotes collaboration, and most importantly, ensures that young people in care have a voice in decisions that affect their lives.

One of the most important principles underpinning this bill is that lived experience is expertise. As members of the CREATE team, each of us has experienced out-of-home care ourselves. We have lived through the systems we are seeking to improve. We understand the difference that a supportive teacher can make. We understand the impact of having to navigate multiple services without guidance. We understand what it feels like when decisions are made about us without our voices being heard. This bill was not developed from assumptions. It was developed from experience, consultation and the voices of young people who know firsthand what support is needed. The Voices for Children in Care Board, the designated support teachers, the educational programs and support connector initiative all share a common purpose: ensuring that no young person in care has to face these challenges alone.

At its heart, this bill is about listening to young people, valuing their experiences and giving them the support that is needed to succeed. Today this house has an opportunity to support a future where children and young people in care are not only protected, but empowered. On behalf of the CREATE team and the many care-experienced young people whose voices have informed this legislation, I thank you all for listening and urge all members to support this bill.

The ACTING SPEAKER: The question is:

That the Strengthening Representation for Children in Care Bill 2026 be now read a second and a third time.

Motion agreed to.

Read second time.

Read third time.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Well done. Congratulations, everyone, on a very high calibre of debate. I sometimes wish our parliamentarians would listen to each other and debate on the fly like you all did, so well done. Congratulations.

Sitting suspended 11:50 am until 1:00 pm.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Kim O’Keeffe): Good afternoon, everyone, and welcome. My name is Kim O’Keeffe, and I am the member for Shepparton in the Legislative Assembly. It is really great to see so many participants again this year. I thought I might just start by giving you a little bit of background of how I ended up in this place. I think it is really exciting, the opportunity that comes for many people to be a member of Parliament. I will tell you it is not a place I thought that I would actually end up. If you had asked me many years ago, it is something I would have been very surprised at, that this is where I am today. It is a big privilege.

I have lived and was raised in Shepparton. Has anyone been to Shepparton? Fantastic, love that. Shepparton is the fifth largest regional city in Victoria and is well known for its successful agriculture, dairy manufacturing and many successful industries. You might have heard of SPC, Shepparton Preserving Company. It is on the supermarket shelves, as well as Campbell’s soup. We do a lot of manufacturing and we are really proud of that. They are very global industries. It is a beautiful region to work and raise a family in, and there are many opportunities.

I ran my own business in the service and training industry for almost 28 years, and my husband ran a retail business for 43 years. So both of us were self-employed most of our life, and I am really proud of that. My husband is here today. We are not supposed to recognise people in the gallery, but we are both very proud to think that we actually supported ourselves over many, many years running our own small businesses in a regional community. It is something we are very proud to be part of.

I have two daughters, one living in Melbourne and one living in Shepparton, so it is good to see that bit of balance. When I am here in Melbourne, I have got some company.

I ran for local government back in 2016 because I wanted to do more for the community that had supported our businesses over many years. I wanted to contribute to a brighter future for the region. Getting to the end of owning my own business and business life, I saw such an amazing opportunity to share my experiences and also my passion to really make sure that regional communities are supported. Going into local government was a big leap of faith for me, and I think it is a really good opportunity to understand that sometimes it is good to look at those opportunities. It may not be where you think you fit, and as I started with my contribution, I was very, I think, courageous to actually take that leap of faith and go into a completely different space.

I was successfully elected into local government. I was first elected out of 29 candidates and went in as deputy mayor in my first year, followed by four years as mayor out of my six years in local government, because I believe when you have an opportunity – I wanted to show leadership. I wanted to step up and really be involved. So to be mayor for almost four years was a very busy role but a great opportunity to really be the spokesperson for such a great city. In 2022 I had the opportunity to run for state government, and as I said, here I am. I completely put myself out of my comfort zone. It was a significant change moving into both local government and state government. But as I said, I took that leap of faith, and it has been incredible learning and an incredible opportunity.

I thank you all for being here. It is incredibly important that the voices of our youth are heard. I have Safa here today as well from my office. He is my youth adviser and engagement officer and is studying year 12, and it is important for my office to have younger people present, hence why I created that role. Safa is from Afghanistan, and it is a real testament to my community. We are a very multicultural community, and I am proud to show that leadership. One of my portfolios is Shadow Assistant Minister for Regional Multicultural Affairs, again one that I really chased because it was such an opportunity to really share, celebrate and acknowledge how successful a diverse community can be, and Shepparton District is one of those communities.

We recently ran our own youth forum in Shepparton, and it was really important because, again, I wanted to hear from younger voices in the community. We had 28 participants, and it was all about them, and it is all about you today. It is so, so important because you have lived experience. I have lived experience, but it is how we share that knowledge. And I always say, when I am out in the community, ‘It’s not about me, it’s about we’. It is about how all of us work together, because for everyone in this room, none of us can do anything alone. We are so much stronger and so much better when we work together. So I congratulate you on coming today and showing leadership. I am really proud of you all.

Finally, I think a good leader is not only someone who encourages and supports, but also someone that continues to learn, and that is what I hope to do today. Every single day when I am out, I hope to learn something new. I would say one of the ways I describe myself is as a very curious person. So if I had the opportunity to talk with you, I would love to know a bit more about you, and that would usually be the first thing I would ask: what are you up to? What are you doing? What are your aspirations? Is there a way that I can help you? So please reach out. You have got my details. It is easy to find me on the internet and by email. If you are ever coming to Shepparton, please, please reach out. I would welcome you. But as I said, it is a real joy to be with you all today, and I am really looking forward to your contributions. It is a very comfortable space. I am sure you have had some fun today.

And just one other thing: I do chair Parliament. I do the acting chair role when I am in Parliament. Once a week I come in, and I still get very nervous, because it can be quite robust. I could have said no when I was asked, and I actually almost did, but then I thought, who gets to actually chair state Parliament? It is such an opportunity and a privilege. And also sitting here when I am in Parliament with our opposition and in government, I learn so much. I learn so much about standing orders and also about the members, so I am glad that I did not say no. I am glad I had courage, because I was tempted to, because sometimes, do you know what we do? We think we do not have the knowledge or the experience. We talk ourselves out of things. So I constantly try and push myself, and I am so glad that I did that because it has given me an opportunity. From a regional city, who thought I would end up chairing state Parliament? All right, we are good to go.

Increased Public Transport Safety Bill 2026

Sponsor: Westbourne Grammar School

Refuter: Boroondara City Council

Introduction and first reading

Marlee McGRATH: I move:

That the bill be now read a first time.

Read first time.

Second reading

Marlee McGRATH: I move:

That the bill be now read a second time.

Before I start, this bill contains sensitive topics regarding violence, abuse and anxiety. If anyone would like to leave the chamber, please do so now.

Every day Victorians trust in public transport to get them home safely, to get them to school, to uni and to work. It is this bill's goal to ensure that this trust is not broken. I urge the house to take a moment to reflect. How many of us rely on trains, trams and buses every single day to simply live our lives? How many of us at some point have felt uncomfortable, vulnerable or unsafe while making these journeys? Public transport should be a place to connect communities, not a place that fosters fear.

Our bill, through effective legislation, targets three layers to safety: feeling safe, being safe and holding accountability, ensuring that all public transport users are safe. Each step of the bill ensures that these layers are accounted for by providing systems that prevent incidents from occurring and help to achieve justice after the fact. Expansion of the existing board ensures that there are specific and appropriate roles directly for transport safety, whilst also ensuring that all other systems are centralised and suitably managed.

Individually each of these clauses has the power to create change, but together they ensure it. Clause 10 guarantees that in all walks of life all public transport users are informed about new and improved campaigns and, most importantly, about the habits and skills that make all Victorians not only feel safe but be safe.

Clause 10.1 uses Safe Transport Victoria's contribution to create a reliable base where safe habit information is standardised, whilst ensuring it has the ability to change with the times. This ensures that experts are involved

in the systems to preserve accuracy and protect Victorians. Clauses 10.2, 10.3 and 10.4 provide a multimodal approach to ensure safety messages genuinely reach each demographic. Younger Australians are far more likely to engage with social media, with 97 per cent of Australians aged 16 to 19 using social media every day, while primary schools are vital in securing safe habits before they develop into unsafe behaviours. On the other hand, older Australians are more responsive to physical advertising and traditional communication methods. A one-size-fits-all approach would simply fail to address the wider community. Through clause 10 we ensure that effective, memorable and engaging information is available to all Victorians. Whether you are a retiree or a primary school student, everyone deserves information which can save their lives. When Victorians are educated, they not only become safe on and around public transport; they feel more confident, protected and safe – a feat that this bill achieves. With education comes change; with change comes a better tomorrow. In a world so reliant on public transport, where for many Victorians it is the only way they can access education, employment and opportunities, it should not feel like a luxury to be safe and protected.

Angus WRIGHT: I greatly admire the noble intentions behind the government's proposed bill. I really do. Public transport safety and accessibility are extremely important factors for people looking to ditch their cars. It is vital for our state's goal of net zero by 2045. However, in its current form the opposition cannot in good conscience support the passing of this bill. Unfortunately, from where I am standing, members of the house, it appears as if the government did little to no background research when drafting their bill. Why am I saying this? As someone who has been using public transport to get to the city for hangouts, to uni and to home almost daily for over 10 years I can unapologetically say that many of these proposed safety measures already exist. For example, on clause 6.1, all trains, buses and trams on the Victorian transport network already have visible service ID numbers on them – on the front, backs or sides of buses, trains and trams. Not only this, but there are emergency procedure instructions that provide passengers with key information, with the vehicle numbers and other information required to contact emergency services. Buses are even easier, as there is no complete physical barrier between the driver and the passengers. On trains and trams there are buttons to directly contact the drivers.

Moreover, clause 5 mandates the installation of new and improved cameras on all forms of public transport. A quick heads-up, what I am about to disclose will shake the foundations of this very building and the entirety of the CBD – the opening scene of *Ice Age* where Scrat desperately attempts to seize his acorn, causing a glacier's collapse in the process. Youth Parliament – heck, the whole of Victoria – will be drastically altered forever. You may cry, you may jump out of your seat with excitement, but I digress. Buses, trains, trams and all 212 metropolitan stations already have CCTV cameras installed, as well as dedicated buildings for Victoria Police and PSOs. All V/Line trains – Acting Speaker, you are aware of this, I am sure, as you hail from Shepparton – they already have CCTV as well. Why did they put this in their bill?

One of the things that this bill does get right, however, is the mandate calling for ramps to be installed in stations. Even then, like almost every other clause in this bill, it sounds good on paper and that is about it. It does raise further questions, though, about the extent of research which was done for this bill. How will the engineers and other workers in the rail sector find the time to fit the installation of these ramps into already busy maintenance schedules? How will the ramps be installed for pre-existing train models?

Members of the house, may I remind the government that Google is free. ChatGPT is as well, and it was very clearly used to write this bill. Clause 5.4 says CCTV cameras shall meet a minimum resolution of 80 megapixels per inch. CCTV cameras cannot be measured in 80 megapixels per inch as this measures two different metrics: total sensor resolution – megapixels; and display density – pixels per inch. High-end commercial security cameras max out at 8 to 12 megapixels per inch. True 80-megapixel cameras do not exist in the security industry, as streaming and storing that much continuous data would completely crush standard storage networks. How do I know this? I did my research. If redundancy was a bill, I think this would take the cake. I would try and make a metaphor for this, but I am lost for words. I am dumbfounded – I mean, I could have done a members statement on why murder should be illegal, and I think it would have had the same effect. Members of the house, when it is time for the conscience vote, consider this: do you want rushed and probably AI-generated legislation to potentially become law? Think about all the clauses that could have been added that actually would have made a difference. I want you all to sit with that while the government try and justify the passing of this bill.

Charlotte McVEIGH: A safe transport system is not one that simply responds to danger, it is one that prevents danger from occurring in the first place. That is why this bill is necessary. Right now our approach to

transport safety is far too often reactive. We wait for incidents, we respond to harm and then we ask how it could have been prevented. This bill changes that pattern.

Clause 4 strengthens Safe Transport Victoria rather than replacing it, because we already have the expertise, independence and systems we need. What we need is capacity. This bill provides that capacity by increasing investigators, safety specialists and analytical staff, ensuring risks are identified early and addressed before they escalate. Safety is not something we achieve after the fact, it is something that we build before anything happens. This is why safe habits workers are introduced – to stop unsafe behaviour before it becomes unsafe action. They will promote safe conduct across public transport, develop clear safety standards and deliver education campaigns that help shape behaviour, not just react to it. They will work directly with users and experts to identify gaps in the current safety systems and to recommend improvements and implement them.

Alongside this, an enforcement division ensures safety laws are upheld and compliance is maintained. But enforcement alone is not enough. We cannot punish our way into prevention. Furthermore, every new investigator, every enforcement officer, every analyst and every safe habits worker will be more than an employee; they are another layer of protection for the Australian public.

This bill invests in skilled jobs that strengthen our workforce while making our transport networks safer for everyone. Every passenger deserves to travel without fear, every worker deserves to go home safely and every journey should be protected and not left to chance. That is why this bill matters, because safety cannot begin after something goes wrong; it must be built in before anything goes wrong at all.

Rahul DOLOI: Assault, harassment and unwanted physical contact are crimes, and they are already investigated by Victoria Police. Stations are already patrolled by protective services officers. This model has been running for over a decade on state transport. When I saw that this bill creates a brand new enforcement division and allows its officers the power to search bags, to detain and, not only that, to run criminal record checks, I realised that the government is not filling the gaps in security. They are in fact building an inferior police force on our transport that is armed with all the power but built on a fraction of the accountability. It is this very infrastructure that Victoria Police carry alongside their powers, subject to independent oversight, training standards and a chain of command. This bill talks a whole lot about the same intrusive powers but somehow stays completely silent on who trains these officers and who they answer to. Why fund imitation when we already own the original? This bill essentially copies the work that police and PSOs already do, all while frivolously burning through money and personnel just to hire a second conductor for an orchestra that is already playing. This bill advocates for the right cause in all the wrong ways. Instead, we should resource Victoria Police and the already trained PSOs. Doing the opposite is slower, costlier and legally riskier. Victorians deserve real security with real oversight. Why don't we strengthen what works instead of duplicating the badge just to dilute the accountability?

Mahi DESAI: Every Victorian deserves to feel safe when using public transport. Whether travelling to school or work or home late at night, no passenger should have to worry about their personal safety. Yet too many Victorians, particularly women and young people, continue to feel vulnerable while using our transport network. Our bill addresses that concern through practical and preventative measures that strengthen safety all across Victoria's public transport system.

Firstly, as seen in clause 5, high-quality CCTV cameras on all forms of public transport are implemented. Cameras will operate continuously, while footage is securely stored and protected from tampering. This ensures incidents can be investigated effectively, while also acting as a powerful deterrent against criminal behaviour. Importantly, this bill recognises that safety should not be limited to Melbourne's CBD. Regional and rural communities deserve the same protection as metropolitan passengers. Regular inspections and rapid upgrades to surveillance will ensure that gaps found in coverage are identified and addressed promptly.

However, safety is more than cameras alone. This bill also strengthens the physical environment of our transport network. As seen in clause 9, improved LED lighting will eliminate dark zones and blind spots on platforms, tram stops and bus shelters. The new infrastructure will follow crime prevention through environmental design principles, creating visible spaces that reduce opportunities for crime and increase natural surveillance. However, let us be realistic, these changes will not happen overnight and will require substantial work to be implemented effectively. But when the alternative is allowing passengers to continue feeling unsafe

on public transport, inaction is simply not an option. Safety should never be a privilege, and this bill helps ensure that every Victorian can travel with confidence.

Livia Sum Yi WONG: They painted us a picture that all passengers deserve protection; however, they never responded to all the flaws that our side of the house has pointed out. So I am going to point out another one. Clause 7 is extremely impractical and is merely a misallocation of precious resources. They mentioned that there will be a chaperoned carriage on each train, and they think that can improve safety. But when an assault happens in carriage 1 and the chaperoned carriage is carriage 8, how can they possibly come to the rescue? In a metro train every two or three carriages has a closed door which cannot be opened by force. Therefore how can one chaperone on a train possibly protect the entire train as a whole? If you say their responsibility is only to protect those two or three carriages, then it is simply not worth the labour and resources paying for them to sit on trains for hours and hours and hours just to protect those two carriages. Further, the immense responsibility imposed on these chaperones is extremely unrealistic. What does the government need them to do? They need them to have a security background, need them to de-escalate situations, need them to detain individuals and need them to provide medical services. Humans are not three-in-one machines. It is not that the more tasks you do, the more effective you are. Instead, it is just likely that no individuals can effectively carry out all these responsibilities and can take the account of this.

A member: Assumption.

Livia Sum Yi WONG: It is not an assumption. When there are police and medical staff, respectively, we simply do not have the need to create a separate, more condensed yet less professional power structure, as suggested by the report titled *Personal Safety and Security on the Metropolitan Train System*. This report states that the Victorian government explicitly suggests the importance of working with the pre-existing police force. Hence if the government cannot prove to us the need for chaperones, this bill shall not be passed. Feeling safe, being safe, holding accountability – this is what they tell us. But how can we feel and be safe when chaperones are expected to do more than they should and can do? How can chaperones hold accountability for this?

Mannat SRIVASTAVA: Let us be honest, navigating Victoria's public transport network feels less like a commute and more like an episode of *Survivor*. Safety is a fundamental right. Our proposed communication measures overhaul this system by introducing two initiatives. Consider a bee: it moves through an environment quietly, minding its own business and desperately trying to blend in and avoid confrontation. It does not scream, it does not start an argument and it does not yell for backup. Instead, it relies entirely on its hidden sting. Similarly, integrating a silent text-based feature on PT platforms acts in that same defensive way. Realistically, if anyone is in a tense situation on a carriage, calling out to say 'Yes, hello, I'm currently being cornered' is simply not an option. This would actively endanger anyone. Hence implementing a text-based feature would allow commuters to ask for help discreetly. Secondly, clause 6.2 is about scaling platform staff based on the risks. We will deploy a visible presence during chaotic school rush hours and commute times to protect students and workers from antisocial behaviour. During off-peak hours these guards will remain at platforms, ensuring guaranteed safety. Let us build a transport system that is connected, genuine and responsive.

Cecilia XU: We all want a transport system where we feel safe, but there is a dangerous difference between a system that protects us and one that watches us. This bill, while the government believes that it is focusing on prevention, is fundamentally a collection of cures for wounds that have already been inflicted. It is a reactive policy masquerading as a proactive solution. Look at the heavy reliance on surveillance in clause 5. The government boasts about an 80-megapixel resolution in clause 5.4, but we must ask: what does a high-definition recording do for a person in the middle of an assault? It does not stop the hand; it captures the image. It is a tool for the courtroom, not the carriage. And who is to say that this will even reach the courtroom? Victoria Legal Aid has stated that public transport offences take six to nine months after reporting to even be contested in Victoria. All this bill does is offer a slow-motion response to a real-time crisis that leaves commuters vulnerable for months while the system stalls. Is this safety or just fundamentally futile? We are essentially telling Victorians: 'Go ahead, travel, and if something happens, we'll make sure we have a clear video of it.'

Furthermore, the entire safety of this network is precariously balanced on the perfect performance of individuals. Under clause 7.4 we are trusting chaperones to subjectively sense potential danger and act. We are betting our safety on a worker's intuition and their ability to de-escalate a crisis in seconds. If the camera is not

checked, if the chaperone is at the other end of the carriage or if the safe habits worker – from clause 4.6 – is tied up in an inquiry, the safety promised by this bill evaporates. True prevention is not about better cameras. It is about making sure the crime never happens. By focusing on cures rather than prevention, this bill fails to address the root of the problem. We cannot support a policy that waits for us to be the victims before it decides to help.

Casey CLARKSON: Every day millions of Victorians are on public transport to get to school, work, medical appointments and home. Yet for far too many people boarding a train is accompanied by one question: will I get home safely? No Victorian should have to ask themselves this question. That is why clause 7 of our bill introduces chaperoned carriages across Victoria's public transport network. The purpose of these carriages is simple: to enhance passenger safety and security – and that is exactly what they will do. Crime Statistics Agency Victoria found that there were more than 13,000 offences recorded on Victoria's public transport network last year. This must change now, and this bill will be able to do that. This concern becomes even greater during non-peak and night-time periods. That is why clause 7.3 mandates that chaperoned carriages operate during these times, when stations are quieter, when services are less crowded and when people feel at their most vulnerable. This clause does not simply place another person on a train. Clause 7.4 establishes clear standards for all chaperones. These are not simply volunteers standing in a train carriage. They are trained professionals with security experience, working with children checks, medical training and a clearly identifiable uniform. In a moment of uncertainty passengers will not have to wonder who can help. They will know. Their presence acts as a source of reassurance for passengers and a deterrent to those who may seek to harm. Whether it is a student travelling home after evening rehearsals, a nurse finishing a late shift or an elderly passenger travelling alone, every Victorian deserves to feel safe on public transport. Safety should never depend on the time of day, the carriage you board or the person sitting beside you. Clause 7 ensures that safety is no longer something passengers hope for; it is something they can expect.

Evangeline FLYNN: It is a pleasure today to refute the Increased Public Transport Safety Bill 2026. In fact I am thrilled, because as the opposition it is our duty to strike down any and all legislation that does not benefit our population or indeed hurts it. Clause 6.3(a)(i) says authorised officers shall prioritise safety and assistance over fare enforcement. I challenge the government on this. These are two extremely important objectives that should not be placed over each other, because the instant we neglect fare collection, how can we ensure quality of travel throughout our network? It is not only the social order of our public transport but our ability to fund it that becomes threatened if we allow our ideals to blind us to reality. Clause 7.4(g)(ii) says:

If a chaperone deems an individual suspicious, they shall be authorised to detain that individual until law enforcement arrives.

My heart sank when I read this. What the government has ignored are the possibilities this opens up for racial profiling and discrimination. When vague wording such as 'suspicious' is employed, it will be taken advantage of. It will lead to faultless people, especially minorities, being wrongfully apprehended merely because of untoward appearances. It will lead to trains being scarred with fear and mistrust. In fact it appears that the government has not even read the fundamental legislation underpinning our state's justice system, the Crimes Act 1958. For an unwarranted arrest to take place, there must be reasonable necessity to protect bystanders, or the detainee must have been found committing a crime. Where does this bill take that into account? I have looked, I have read and I have pondered – it does not. So why does the government feel entitled to override elementary principles of fairness and a presumption of innocence?

Ada OZKAN: Each year hundreds of Victorians are injured on our train network because of trips, slips and falls. Around 380 passengers suffer injuries at Victorian train stations annually and approximately 450 people fall through the gap between the platform and the train each year. These are not just statistics: they are real human people. They represent the preventable injuries that affect everyday Victorians. While newer stations have been designed with greater accessibility in mind, many older stations continue to present unnecessary risks. Uneven platforms, large platform gaps and limited accessibility make travelling more dangerous, particularly for older Victorians, people with disabilities, parents with prams and anyone using mobility aids.

Clause 8 provides practical and achievable solutions to these problems. Subclauses 8.1 and 8.2 introduce clearly marked safety zones and improved ramp access. Safety zones provide a designated area where vulnerable passengers can board and exit trains with greater confidence, particularly during busy peak-hour periods. They also increase awareness among other passengers, encouraging safer behaviour on crowded platforms. The introduction of ramps is equally important. Automatic ramps at new stations and easily

deployable ramps at older stations will significantly improve accessibility while reducing the risks of falls and injuries. Victorians simply deserve accessibility to be provided. Victorians deserve measures that are reliable, safe and consistent. Ultimately, clause 8 is about creating a public transport network that is safer, more accessible and more inclusive. No Victorian should face unnecessary danger simply because they are catching a train. This clause delivers practical reforms that will reduce preventable injuries, improve accessibility and give every Victorian greater confidence when using our public transport system.

Thomas CURKOWSKYJ: This bill is lacking in depth, accuracy and detail. The government is attempting to tackle crime, disability access and public risk management under a single banner of public transport safety. That scope is just too broad for effective legislation. A bill needs to have a clear and defined focus to be workable in practice. By trying to address everything at once, this bill sacrifices the detail and precision needed to solve any of these issues effectively. Across the bill its provisions are consistently underdeveloped and lack the specificity required to be effective. I am sure later on the government is going to say that the intentions of this bill are in the right place and that we should pass something that is a step in the right direction, even if it is not perfect. But this bill only offers ineffective ideas and rebranded existing measures. I cannot say that this bill is a step in the right direction, because there is no meaningful reform in this legislation that moves us closer to its stated goals. Crime reduction, accessibility and public risk management are worthy objectives, make no mistake, but they deserve dedicated legislation with clear objectives, targeted provisions and appropriate scrutiny. The opposition does not support this bill. It is beyond amendment. It should instead be divided into separate bills, each with a clear purpose, and drafted with the level of detail that these important issues deserve.

Chloe ORD-HUME: The opposition claims increased surveillance within these carriages will not assist in preventing these assaults from occurring in the first place. This simply is not true. To elaborate, 70 per cent of women who experience sexual harassment on public transport within Victoria do not report these crimes, likely out of fear. Increased surveillance means an increased chance of that offender being caught and penalised. Therefore offenders will, as a result of this bill, be less likely to offend in the first place due to the fear of potential and likely punishment.

Golbarg MASTOURI: I am sure that a large number of the parliamentarians in this house today who have used public transport have experienced some form of witnessing of authorised personnel, such as Myki inspectors, at their job. How many do you usually see together – two or three? They do not stick to the one train; they roam about ensuring the safety of all public transport users. Clause 7.4(a), however, wants every single carriage to be chaperoned. Where are these chaperones coming from? Employees do not just grow on a tree because the government decided that an industry already facing difficulty, both financially and environmentally at work, should be overflowed with more underpaid workers. Every carriage? Has the government considered just how many trains are active per day? These hundreds of trains have anywhere from three to seven carriages. That is hundreds of employees – hundreds of employees that do not exist on the bare, fruitless tree.

Isabelle Rose MAROVITCH: Firstly, I will be mentioning cases of harassment, so please feel free to leave the room if that will affect you.

As a young girl who catches public transport upwards of 10 times a week, the amount of times I have been approached and made uncomfortable by strangers are countless. In situations like these, boundaries are pushed and violated, leaving victims scared and vulnerable. The majority of the time there is no-one to turn to. I know this feeling. I am sure many of you in this room do too. This is why I commend the initiative of this bill, particularly clause 7 and the introduction of chaperoned carriages on all forms of public transport. Research shows that over 50 per cent of young women have experienced unwanted sexual attention or harassment on Victoria's public transport. Confidence in this proposal is not without precedent. Countries such as Japan have successfully introduced designated safe train carriages to address these safety concerns. The government's bill builds upon this by ensuring trained chaperones are present to provide immediate assistance – therefore preventing escalation. Public transport is a daily necessity for so many Victorians, so it must be safe.

Charlotte FLEMING: Through my reading of this bill, I am now under the impression that the government have never taken public transport in their lives. Clause 8.3 outlines the use of posters near each platform to educate passengers and prevent fall risks. The government has proposed these posters that already exist. Have you ever heard of the 'Mind the gap' announcements or seen the posters or the big yellow lines on platforms? However, I am thankful that they already exist, because the government seem to believe that posters being

simply near – not on; near – the platforms is enough. Additionally, I wish to ask the government if they have ever caught a train at 8 am on a Tuesday. If they had, they would be well aware that the majority of Victorians actively wear headphones and are entirely consumed by their phones while catching public transport. In doing so posters are made almost entirely redundant, especially posters about overcrowding. If you want to prevent overcrowding, then this bill should suggest more frequent train services, which would actually improve safety from our current delayed services. This bill simply repeats what is already working and suggests strategies that have been created from dreams, not reality.

Tehreem LUGMANI: The opposition points to campaigns like Mind the Gap and argues that public safety awareness already exists, but that argument proves the need for this bill, not the opposite. Mind the Gap is repeated constantly because safety cannot depend on one sign, one announcement or one reminder. It works because it is built into the environment itself. That is exactly what this bill is trying to achieve. A warning in a train station should not be the limit of our imagination for public safety. Indeed there are existing assault and harassment guidelines, but there is no enforcement. That is why Victorians are still living in fear every single time they step onto a bus, tram or train. It is not unnecessary to allow police officers to search bags when justifiable. It is called going through with what is promised, actually allowing Victorian citizens to feel safe when travelling. Just because the laws exist does not mean that they are being enforced effectively, but that is exactly what this bill will do if passed. The opposition has also brought up that cameras are a tool of the courtroom. Yes, cameras can be a tool of the courtroom, because they will allow for offenders to be held accountable and for justice to be served.

Izaan Ahmah SRAMBIYAN: I rise to oppose clause 8 of this bill. I commend the intentions behind this bill, but honestly, this clause does not introduce any new safety measures. It simply restates current services that Safe Transport Victoria already provides. For example, clause 8.2 references ramps to allow safe entry and exit for passengers with mobility aids. If the government had bothered to hop on any Metro in Victoria, they would know that this is already an amenity provided, and it is provided for all Metros and V/Lines. The same applies with clause 8.4, for example. It mandates identifying wet floors, using 'Wet floor' signs, and regularly maintaining handrails, ramps and flooring. These are not groundbreaking reforms. They are basic occupational health and safety requirements that stations already follow. Cleaning staff already place hazard signs and maintenance teams already inspect infrastructure. Stations already have legal obligations to keep passengers safe. This Parliament should be passing legislation that addresses genuine gaps in the system, not copying and pasting current Safe Transport Victoria procedures into legislation. If a bill simply duplicates current practice, it creates unnecessary bureaucracy without improving passenger safety one bit.

Talal NAVEED: I would like to make a disclaimer that this speech contains mention of harassment, so if that makes anyone uncomfortable, I ask that you leave now.

I would like it to be known that I take public transport daily to and from school, the gym and work and anything on top of that. In that time I have been harassed by a suspected child predator, when I was 14; I have been approached by druggies at various times of the day and night; and I have heard stories from my sisters, my mother and my relatives about unwanted attention and encounters on public transport. In my mind this is more than enough for ongoing precautions taken for the safety of people who use PTV. Furthermore, clause 7.4 does not say 'every carriage'. It says 'each chaperoned carriage', which would be around one per train.

Zeinab ABDO: I would like to draw attention to clause 6.4(a), which proposes the integration of silent text-based reporting. These reporting channels would be easily abused through jokes and immaturity, creating a space not for reporting but instead for fooling around. This bill is a train completely off the tracks. To maintain this text-based monitoring, who would actually be overseeing this? We cannot trust legislation that does not provide us with information to trust, leaving us to fill in the blanks. There are no details that come with this clause, no specification of how often and how quickly help would be sent to reported danger. So what does this bill really do? It provides us with a picture, not protection. If we shift the tracks too late, we risk completely losing control. So if the government really cares about safety and reports, maybe we stop the harm before it must be reported.

Komal GILL: The opposition has repeatedly attacked the bill in question by insisting that minor flaws define the intent of the bill. They have aggressively disregarded the effort made by this bill for their safety by proposing it was written by ChatGPT rather than their fellow hardworking peers. They have openly targeted hatred toward the bill despite this bill directly concerning their welfare. This bill strengthens systems already in

place to strengthen safety standards because current systems are not fully effective. The opposition explicitly stated that current systems have been in place for more than a decade. Does this mean that the system is never to be adapted? With changing society comes change in favour of society's safety and wellbeing. A well-built system, like a well-built train, will work but will not last forever. This is why this bill is crucial. The bill does not disregard the current system. It merely targets its flaws to strengthen the system overall. Moreover, the extensive staff employment for public transport safety proposed in this bill will aid in solving the job crisis. The opposition is clearly blinded by unaccounted-for hatred. They fail to comprehend the bill, focusing on words over meaning. This bill does not propose measurement standards for camera lenses; it insists that all Victorians receive the safety they deserve. It achieves the basic human right of being able to feel safe. And so I ask the opposition: do we deserve to feel safe? The opposition's hatred should not be tolerated, rather an initiative for a safer Victoria should be embraced.

Hteemoo YOHELLAYMUSAW: I would like to reiterate that good intentions alone are not sufficient. The government has failed to provide anywhere in their bill for accountability for chaperones, which only opens the door to the risk of abuse of power. Moreover, I would like to address clause 10, which is looking to introduce the largest advertising campaign ever seen in the state on the public transport network. It is seeking valuable advertising space across the network, which will no doubt come at a great cost. Such a high-expense campaign deserves detail, accountability and effectiveness. Unfortunately, the government has not outlined when this campaign will start, how long it will run for, nor has it set a target for engagement or any other KPIs. For people looking to seek more information, they too are left out. The only place for anyone to get information will be from legacy media like newspapers and the TV. Moreover, the government has also forgotten to provide information through customer services such as its websites or on the phone. Why should we use our resources on a bill that lacks depth and effort?

Helal BEIROUTI: Let me make something extremely clear: some people do not feel safe on public transport at night. Since people seem to not know how to stop making others uncomfortable, the implementation of clause 7 is extremely important. These carriages will allow people to travel home safely, shielding them from the dark matters of the night. When I saw this bill, I was filled with joy because just the other day I was told by a friend of mine that they wished someone would do something to make public transport safe again. What did she suggest? Chaperoned carriages. This is the way, the way to feel safe again.

Roqya HUSSEINI: This side of the house is not opposed to safer public transport. We are opposed to wishful thinking dressed up as legislation. The Increased Public Transport Safety Bill 2026 is a detail-minded document: high-definition cameras on every vehicle, cheaper ones across Metro and V/Line; a 25 per cent increase in responsive officers and a 20 per cent increase in safety specialists; LED lighting upgrades at every platform and bus shelters and tram stops; and help points, tested weekly at every major hub. This house might reasonably ask: how much will this cost? This bill does not say – not a single dollar, not a funding source, not a cost-benefit analysis, not even instructions to the relevant minister to find one. Under clause 4 Safe Transport Victoria is simply told to expand. Under clause 5 cameras are simply to be installed. Under clause 9 lighting failures are simply to be fixed within 24 hours. Put simply, good intentions without funding are not policy. They are a wish list. Every dollar committed without a budget list is a dollar that cannot be delivered to housing, health care or other important facilities.

The sponsor has identified a real problem: 31.3 per cent of Victorians feeling unsafe at night, and that is not acceptable. We are not disputing that, but a bill that cannot answer the most basic questions is not public policy. How are we going to pay for this? Is this ready for the house? We urge members to reject this bill until it returns with costed funding and a financial accountability framework behind it.

Ayaan ABDULLAH: The opposition mentioned how pre-existing measures already exist to contact drivers in emergency situations, but they failed to consider the depth of what was said. Did they forget an overarching factor? Did they not notice the key word here? Let me clarify something by asking you this: do you expect a train driver to stop a train because someone feels uncomfortable? No. That is exactly what we are trying to fill in: the safety and security of every single Victorian, just like yourselves. Do you want to be stuck on a train with someone hostile, someone armed, someone with disgusting intentions and be left vulnerable? Instead you need to rely on a big red button. Is that your lifeline – a button? Is that what this state has come to, holding the lives of millions of Victorians on the concept of a button? No. We have a problem and we have a solution. I would advise the opposition to look at the broader picture and the impact of the bill rather than continuing to nitpick at the small, insignificant matters.

Erfan RAHIMY: Let me just get this clear: they basically said the bill makes no sense, but that does not matter because they have a somewhat good thought. Seriously, try to make it make sense, first of all. Looking back, both clauses 10.2 and 8.4 are basically duplicates of each other, and they already exist. If you want to make some changes or do something effective, try to come up with new ideas, not go back to the previous ideas and try to make them your own.

Peyton CROFT: Broken lights or lack of lighting in public transport waiting areas create immediate areas of high risk for assaults. Leaving a station in darkness due to budgeting is a massive liability. Why would the opposition wish to support keeping public transport infrastructure that is a danger to all individuals? Ensuring that any lighting failure is addressed within 24 hours of being identified means that transport infrastructure is kept lit and safe as soon as possible.

Syakir Amni SAIFUDIN: I would like to highlight the vagueness of clause 8.1 and the safety zones. In the bill the government fails to address where these safety zones will be placed, what the shape of them is and what they will look like. They fail to address how these safety zones will accommodate for colourblind individuals and fail to accommodate for the fact that a train will never stop at the same place. How will they know that a door will always stop in front of a safety zone? Frankly, clause 8 is ineffective at its purpose of reducing the risk of falling at train stations. Let us look at practical examples of solutions to this issue. In Singapore train stations have fences and gates which block off the tracks, and this has already been incorporated into the new Metro Tunnel stations. If you want to reduce the risk of falling at train stations, how about looking at real-life, practical solutions and making use of those, instead of using these ineffective solutions which have not been properly thought out.

Marlee McGRATH: As a house, I think we can agree that everyone deserves to feel safe, especially when simply just living their lives. Our bill effectively uses prevention, awareness and security to ensure that all Victorians, no matter who they are, have the right to feel safe and be safe on public transport. The opposition has argued that there are already systems in place. We are not saying we are going to add cameras that are already implemented, we are saying we are going to add useful cameras that are of high quality. We are not saying to add communication services for emergencies, we are saying to add communication services for those moments when you feel uncomfortable, scared or vulnerable. The opposition said this bill does not prevent unsafety. They said that we are waiting for Victorians to become victims. They focused on surveillance, not preventing crime. Yet they conveniently failed to mention the education systems preventing the issues from occurring and the chaperoned carriages, which directly prevent the escalation of events and deter violence.

The opposition has mentioned the bill being non-specific by leaving this to the discretion of Safe Transport Victoria. However, by doing this, we allow development and fluidity over time so that they can work when these situations inevitably change, whilst also ensuring that this information is reliable and developed by experts. This bill is essential not just because of the effectiveness of the legislation but because I should not have to hold my keys between my knuckles, I should not have to look over my shoulder walking home from the station at night and I should not have to face my back to a wall and pretend to be on a phone call just to feel safe. Protect me. Protect each other. Protect Victorians.

The ACTING SPEAKER: The question is:

That the Increased Public Transport Safety Bill 2026 be now read a second and a third time.

Motion agreed to.

Read second time.

Read third time.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Well done, everyone. I might just give a little bit of feedback. The research was absolutely outstanding. I learned something from each of you in regard to your opinions. You all spoke incredibly confidently, and it is not easy to get up in the chamber. I know that myself, and some days can be harder than others, but I think you all did incredibly well. I could hear you very clearly, and well done, as I said, on the research, because that is an important thing when you make a debate; you need to back it up.

The only criticism I have is that when you are in the chamber, you need to speak to the Chair. You need to go through the Speaker, and that was a little bit rare in here today. When you are delivering, you are actually

speaking to the Chair. That is an important part and a good learning when you are in the chamber. It is good to talk across as well at certain times, but I often come back and will often reflect back to the Chair and remind myself that that is who I am actually addressing.

The other thing I would encourage you to do is to share a bit more lived experience or community connection with the bill. It is really valuable and has a really strong connection to the bill when you actually share a bit more lived experience or real experiences from within your communities.

Well done. I really enjoyed it. I think you have all done an incredible job, and as I said, I learned a lot from your contributions, so thank you very much. You all did so well. It is actually hard to choose who was my top three. I think you all did so, so well. Well done. Give yourselves a clap. It has been so lovely to see you all.

Sitting suspended 2:00 pm until 2:18 pm.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Kim O’Keeffe): Welcome back, everyone. I hope you have had a bit of a stretch and some water. I think I will share one little interesting thing with you that I noticed coming into the chamber and tell you about a very big mistake I made when I was first elected. I was talking to one of the members and I walked out without bowing to the Speaker, and do you know what, she yelled out, ‘Member for Shepparton, you need to have respect.’ My office were tuned in and listening to that. Do you know what? Did I do it again? Never. It is an interesting place.

Increased Resourcing in Rural Areas for Hospitals and Ambulance Services Bill 2026

Sponsor: Active Citizens

Refuter: John Fawcner College

Introduction and first reading

Vishnu EASWAR: I move:

That the bill be now read a first time.

Read first time.

Second reading

Vishnu EASWAR: I move:

That the bill be now read a second time.

Victorians’ access to health care should not be decided by their postcode. It should not depend on whether they live in Melbourne or hours away in a rural town. It should not depend on whether there is a specialist nearby, and it definitely should not depend on whether an ambulance can arrive quickly enough, or whether a hospital has enough staff to provide the care that each and every person deserves. It should depend on one thing and on one thing only, that every Victorian, no matter where they live, has the right to access safe, reliable and timely health care. Today I stand in support of the Increased Resourcing in Rural Areas for Hospitals and Ambulance Services Bill 2026.

Let me make one thing very clear. This bill is not asking for special treatment for any rural Victorians. It is just asking that they be treated equally. It is asking that a person’s chance of receiving timely health care not be dependent on their geographical location. For many metropolitan Victorians seeing a doctor, visiting a hospital or accessing a specialist may be inconvenient, but it is most definitely possible. That very same appointment for a rural or regional Victorian might mean hours of travel, greater costs, missed work and time away from work. The stress of not knowing whether care will be available is also a huge factor. For many, this is not just an inconvenience, this is injustice. The bill itself highlights that Australians living in rural and regional areas in Victoria are almost three times more likely to get hospitalised and die from preventable causes – three times. This statistic should concern each and every member of this house, because to us it is not just a statistic; it is a real person, someone who needed access, who needed care but just was unable to access it.

This bill creates structured rural clinical placements so medical students can gain real experience in rural health settings. These placements help students understand the challenges regional patients face, while developing

practical skills in communities that need more support. Rural health care requires flexibility, confidence and a strong understanding of community needs. This bill gives future doctors the opportunity to build their skills. It also supports residency pathways, early career rotations and incentives for long-term rural services. If we want more doctors in rural Victoria, we must create reasons for them to work there, train there and stay connected to those communities. Workforce shortages cannot be simply fixed by asking doctors to move. They need structured pathways and real opportunity.

Specialist care is another major part of this bill. Rural Victorians should not have to travel for hours for services that metropolitan Victorians can access much closer to home. Access to specialists in areas such as general practice, paediatrics, cardiology and many other different healthcare sectors can prevent conditions from worsening, reduce avoidable hospitalisation and take pressure off emergency departments.

This bill strengthens emergency response services in emergencies such as strokes, cardiac arrests, severe asthma attacks or serious accidents. Minutes matter and by improving ambulance coverage, upgrading resources, communication systems and coordination with other emergency services, this bill works to ensure that distance does not dictate survival. Telehealth also has an important role. It should not be treated as a replacement for in-person care, and when used properly, it can reduce unnecessary travel, provide earlier support and help people with high-risk conditions stay connected to medical professionals.

Health care must also be culturally safe. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in rural and regional areas can face additional barriers, including distance, transport difficulties and a lack of culturally appropriate services. By strengthening Aboriginal community controlled health organisations, supporting outreach, improving transport and promoting respectful care, this bill recognises that true access requires trust and respect.

This bill is not just about hospitals; it is about fairness, opportunity and protecting lives. It gives medical students a pathway to serve rural communities. It helps rural patients access specialist emergency care and telehealth support. Most importantly, it says that rural Victorians should not have to accept a lower standard of health care simply because of where they live. Rural communities have waited long enough, and for these reasons I proudly commend this bill to the house.

Arisha PRASAD: I speak today to oppose the Increased Resourcing in Rural Areas for Hospitals and Ambulance Services Bill 2026. Firstly, I wish to acknowledge that this bill is addressing a significant amount of rural Victorians by being provided the right to access quality health care just as much as anyone living in residential areas. However, good intentions do not automatically make good legislation. While this bill sounds promising on paper, it fails to provide realistic, practical and financial responsible solutions. The biggest weakness in this bill is that it promises far more than it can realistically deliver. Throughout the bill we see repeated commitments to increase specialist services, expand telehealth, create new ambulance centres, upgrade equipment, establish new training pathways, introduce motivation programs and even create specialised hospital wards. Yet nowhere in this legislation does it explain how any of this will actually be funded. Our health care is already one of the largest expenses in the Victorian budget. Expanding all of these services without outlining a funding source is simply irresponsible. If we pass law without even understanding its financial impact, we risk creating promises that cannot be fulfilled.

Secondly, this bill assumes that simply placing more doctors and students in rural areas will solve the workplace shortage. Unfortunately the problem is much more complex than that. Many healthcare workers choose not to stay in rural communities, because of limited career opportunities, family commitments, housing fall-outs and professional isolation. While this bill offers motivation, it never explains whether this motivation will actually be enough to encourage long-term commitment. In fact mandatory rural placements may even discourage some medical students from studying medicine in Victoria altogether. Forcing placements does not guarantee people will actually choose to work in rural areas after graduation; instead it risks creating resentment rather than genuine interest in rural health care as a job or career.

Another major concern is that this bill places enormous pressure on rural hospitals themselves. Many hospitals are already understaffed and operating under significant pressure. They simply may not have enough experienced supervisors to properly train large numbers of students, interns and specialist rotations at the same time. If healthcare professionals are spending more time supervising trainees than treating patients, this actually could reduce the quality of health care rather than improving it. This bill also relies heavily on telehealth as a

solution, as shown in clause 7. While telehealth is certainly valuable, it cannot replace face-to-face examinations, surgeries and physical specialist treatments, and many specialists still require patients to be physically present. Another issue is the sheer complexity of this bill. This bill creates multiple new programs, partnerships, operating systems, audits, placements, schemes, specialist rotations, ambulance upgrades, cultural initiatives and telehealth services all at once. Trying to implement so many major changes in a short time period would create unnecessary admin pressure and increase the likelihood of delays, confusion and wasted resources.

Finally, this bill lacks measurable outcomes. It tells us what it wants to achieve but provides very little detail about how success will actually be measured, how many doctors are expected to be in rural areas and for what periods of time. How much will ambulance response times improve? What targets will determine whether these expensive programs are actually working? Without clear performance measures Parliament cannot properly hold the government accountable. As I said at the beginning of my speech, everyone in this chamber agrees that rural health care deserves improvement. Yet this bill asks Parliament to approve an overly ambitious plan without clear funding, clear realistic workforce solutions and without measurable outcomes. Good policies should be practical, affordable and achievable. Yet this bill – *(Time expired)*

Akshara VASUDEVAN: Imagine if seeing a specialist meant travelling hundreds of kilometres away. For many rural Victorians, this is not a hypothetical situation, it is their reality. Our goal is not just to provide communities in rural areas with accessible health care but to create opportunities for young doctors and medical students to be a part of the solution. As someone who is a part of the next generation, giving young people this opportunity is so important. However, here is the reality we face: nationally, only around 15 to 22 per cent of graduating medical students go on to work in rural areas, and this is largely influenced by whether they come from a rural background. In contrast, studies show that approximately 46 per cent of graduates who complete rural clinical training choose to work in similar communities. So what does this tell us? It tells us that rural clinical training works. It exposes future doctors to the unique challenges and rewards of practising medicine in rural areas. This is why clause 4 of our bill is so important. Mandatory rural clinical placements not only provide students with invaluable practical experience but also raise awareness of the healthcare challenges facing rural Victorians. By connecting future healthcare professionals with these communities early in their careers, we create a stronger, more sustainable rural workforce.

Beyond benefiting students, these placements also bring additional support into regional hospitals, strengthen connections between universities and local health services and, most importantly, encourage aspiring generations to build strong connections and relationships with the communities they serve. By witnessing the disparities between metropolitan and rural areas, medical students have the ability to be a part of this change. Let me be clear: this clause is not simply about training doctors, it is about inspiring the next generation of healthcare professionals to step forward and change Victoria. If we want lasting improvements in rural health care, we must pay attention to the people who will deliver them.

Ayesha KHAN: This house is not debating whether rural Victoria deserves better health care. It absolutely does. While the intention of this bill may be commendable, the bill in its current form is nothing but a fantasy built on assumptions and illogical strategies. Clause 4.2 assumes every medical student has the ability to relocate to a rural area for clinical placements, but have the sponsors considered the reality many students face? Medical students are already burdened with work, university fees, family responsibilities and financial stress – not to mention that many clinical placements are unpaid, meaning students are expected to cover the costs of accommodation, travel, food and everyday living expenses from their own pockets. If these placements must be mandatory, then those opposite should mention financial aid for students who simply cannot afford this.

Clause 4.2 expresses how placements should contain a minimum proportion of total clinical training time. However, the bill never mentions how long that period of time is – a week, four weeks, 20 weeks? What is the use of creating legislation when it leaves so many questions unanswered and unspecified? Furthermore, was the workload of specialised doctors considered before the creation of this clause? Rural hospitals are already facing workforce shortages. Doctors are busy treating patients and performing surgeries. Now this bill expects those specialists to supervise additional students and give feedback regularly and requires data collection for the purpose of effectiveness and quality. These expectations create a heavy workload on these supervisors. Requiring medical students to complete a rural placement will not automatically make them stay. Once their placement ends, students will return to metropolitan hospitals. Why don't we ask the more important questions?

Why don't these students return after graduation? Is it because of limited career opportunities, lack of social infrastructure – (*Time expired*)

The ACTING SPEAKER: Can I please acknowledge the member for Broadmeadows in the chamber.

Izaan Ahmah SRAMBIYAN: At its core, this bill recognises a simple but vital truth: the level of health care that one receives should never be determined by their postcode – not in Victoria. Nearly 30 per cent of Australians live in rural and regional communities – that is a third of the country – and yet these communities continue to experience far poorer health outcomes when compared to those living in metropolitan areas. Australians living in rural and remote areas are 2.9 times more likely to be hospitalised and 2.7 times more likely to die from potentially avoidable causes. These are not just statistics; they represent real people, real families and real communities that have been neglected by a system that should be serving all Victorians equally. While there are some rural communities that may have access to GPs, the access to specialist health care is extremely scarce. More than 85 per cent of specialists in Australia operate only in major cities. For most of these communities, accessing specialist health care means travelling hours for consultations, treatments and basic care. This is exactly why clause 5 of this bill is so important. The residency and specialist program will increase access to specialised medical care by placing specialist practitioners in rural and regional areas, particularly in high-demand areas such as paediatrics and cardiology. This is not a short-term fix, it is a long-term solution to an issue that has been ignored by the state government for far too long. By creating clear pathways for specialist practice, the likelihood of these professionals building their careers in the communities that need them the most is increased. Every single Victorian deserves fair access to health care, no matter where they are, and this bill takes real, meaningful action to close the gap in the unjust, inequitable access to health care that never should have existed in the first place.

Laura ORD-HUME: I have no doubt that many honourable members who represent rural communities want this bill to succeed; so do I. However, Parliament cannot pass legislation unless ideas hold genuine ability to be carried out effectively. This clause is filled with promises but provides little explanation of how those promises will actually be delivered. Our rural communities deserve more than vague commitments. They deserve legislation that is practical, accountable and capable of delivering real outcomes.

Clause 5.2 assumes doctors will simply move to rural areas because of a workforce shortage, but has the opposition considered why many families choose not to? Doctors have families, carers and communities they have built their lives around. Instead of addressing the reasons behind the shortage, like a lack of opportunities, reliable telecommunication, public transport and many more, this bill simply expects specialists to relocate while overlooking the fact that metropolitan hospitals also rely heavily on these specialist doctors. Another issue with this bill is clause 5.3, which claims rotating specialists between metropolitan and rural hospitals will ensure continuity of care. The opposition literally contradict their own argument. Patients build trust over periods of time with ongoing, consistent treatment, forming a strong bond with healthcare professionals. If doctors are constantly rotating between hospitals, patients are constantly adjusting to new specialists. This is the opposite of continuity. In addition to this, it is concerning how little detail this clause actually provides. Has the opposition really thought this through? It repeatedly states incentives shall be provided but never explains what those incentives are or how they will be funded, who qualifies for them or whether they are actually enough to attract specialists. We cannot pass legislation based on vague promises and hope the details are sorted out later. This bill may appear promising in theory; however, it must be judged on what it can realistically achieve, not what it hopes to achieve. This bill leaves too many questions unanswered and lacks detail. Our rural communities deserve practical solutions, not vague promises that risk raising expectations without guaranteeing results.

Nish SHETTY: Whilst it is certain that instigating a change to the current healthcare system is essential, delivering that change to all Victorians is equally as important. This is where a key component of the system comes into question – that is, the efficacy of ambulance response capability statewide. Most regional councils are situated at far distances from the Melbourne metropolitan district, contributing to greater travelling distances for ambulances. As of 2026 the baseline emergency response timing for a code 1 or high-priority level emergency in Victoria is around 15 minutes. Out of a total of 48 regional councils surveyed this year alone, only 11 registered response times below or at the 15-minute threshold – less than 25 per cent. Clause 8 of our bill outlines the integration of the rural ambulance response enhancement program, or RARE for short. The RARE program enlists resourcing to hospitals and ambulance centres with the provisions necessary to operate their vehicles. This includes further financial support for repairs and maintenance and the installation of

vehicular modifications which best suit to optimising the transportation quality of the ambulances. Modifications to ensure the welfare of patients have also been taken into account, and an effort to reinforce the communication systems between response units and Triple Zero call centres is another major priority which the RARE program will also cater for. The RARE program will also outsource vehicles from both the Victorian fire and police departments to cooperate in an appropriate response scenario. Once the call has been received by Triple Zero the responding emergency communication officer will dispatch an ambulance along with another response unit, which may provide appropriate mitigation to the emergency situation. It is crucial that our ambulance services do not fall short of protecting the lives of Victorians during emergency situations, and more crucial that we recognise in such situations that travelling distance should not determine the life or death of an individual.

Airah NAUMAN: I rise to discuss various flaws within this bill. Although clause 7 aims to improve access to health care through telehealth, it fails to address several practical barriers that limit its effectiveness. Installing such systems or devices does not address the underlying shortage of healthcare professionals in rural Victoria. This clause also raises significant implementation questions, as it does not clarify who will maintain the patient monitoring devices, how false emergency alerts will be managed or how accessibility will be ensured. Furthermore, the success of telehealth depends on reliable internet, electricity and digital connectivity, yet many rural and regional communities continue to experience inconsistent network shortages. If patients cannot reliably connect to these services, then the accessibility this clause promises is not guaranteed. Without these practical details it is difficult to determine whether these measures can operate efficiently. Let us turn to clause 8. It proposes the implementation of the rural ambulance response enhancement program, or the RARE program, which aims to expand ambulance coverage across high-need rural areas. However, this raises significant concerns regarding how these areas will be prioritised. While the clause lists factors such as emergency response times, travel distance and population distribution, it fails to explain how these criteria will be balanced. Let us say one community has a larger population but another experiences significantly longer travel times to emergency services. Answer me this: which community receives priority? Without clarity there is no guarantee that resources will be distributed fairly or consistently across rural Victoria. When lives are at stake, Victorians deserve certainty. Promises alone cannot save lives.

Raghav ANANTHANATHAN: As we have already heard today, there is a significant gap in healthcare access between those living in cities and those living in rural areas. In fact people living in rural areas have 45 per cent less access to hospitals and ambulance services than those living in cities. A key driver of this is distance, and clause 7 before us today directly targets that barrier. As said earlier, there is an underlying cause for the disparity, being the distance. Rural areas are significantly further from hospitals, since they are usually built closer to where most people live, being the city. Therefore the consequences for people living in rural areas are far more severe. The telehealth clause of our bill directly addresses this issue. For everyday consultations, instead of an individual having to drive an hour and a half to see a specialist, they can simply head to the nearest rural hospital and from there can remotely access a specialist from a major hospital. This allows them to receive the same quality of care as people who live in metropolitan areas somewhere close to home. This also ensures patients with high-risk or chronic conditions are given patient-monitoring devices at home, which track things like heart rate and oxygen levels. If a sudden medical emergency was to take place, this would automatically send an alert to both the supervising doctor and emergency services simultaneously, meaning help is dispatched without the patient even having to call 000. This disparity will only continue to grow if we fail to act. The people living in rural areas across Victoria deserve the same standard of care, and this clause is the response they have been waiting for.

Anisa SHAH: I would like to bring attention to clause 9, as it assumes that conducting mandatory biannual audits will improve rural health care. However, audits only identify problems. They do not in any way provide a solution. Victoria is already aware that rural hospitals experience staff shortages, long waiting times and limited specialist services. The bill states that workforce shortages will be addressed through targeted recruitment and placement programs. However, this assumes that there are enough healthcare professionals available to recruit. The real issue is that Victoria already has a shortage of doctors and nurses willing to work in rural communities. A recruitment program cannot place workers who simply do not exist. Without measures to increase the overall healthcare workforce or improve long-term retention this proposed bill is unlikely to achieve its intended outcome. Clause 9 allows additional healthcare professionals to be temporarily displaced to high-need areas. Whilst this may relieve pressure in one hospital, it simply shifts staff from another location. As a result, one community benefits while another may experience increased shortages. If a hospital has staff

shortages or outdated equipment, it does not guarantee that these issues will be resolved. This means the same issue could continue to appear in results year after year without meaningful improvement. Although we support the intent of this bill, it does not have meaningful results. It overlooks the harsh reality that many rural towns simply do not have enough services or qualified professionals to meet these demands. Families who are already isolated could be promised help that never arrives, leaving them feeling abandoned and forgotten. Instead of reducing inequality this clause risks widening the gap between metropolitan and rural Victoria as people continue to face long travel times and limited access to support.

Pranav BALASUBRAMANIAM: As has been mentioned previously, our goal is to bridge the gap in healthcare access and specialised healthcare availability across rural and regional Victoria. One group that has been disproportionately affected by this gap are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders. 49.8 per cent of the Aboriginal population live in rural Victoria. That is over 32,000 individuals who face barriers to healthcare access not because health care does not exist, not because medical expertise is unavailable, but because reaching that care still remains a challenge. When access is missing health care becomes a privilege rather than a right. For many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples the challenge is accessing trusted and culturally safe health care. This is why clause 6 is essential. It recognises that improving healthcare outcomes requires more than increasing the amount of services; rather it requires health care that is culturally safe, accessible and community led. It improves access through patient transport services, mobile medical units and expanded Aboriginal community controlled health organisations. It strengthens culturally safe care through specialised hospital wards and culturally informed healing practices. It builds trust through public education initiatives and health check-ins incorporated into cultural yarning groups. Together these measures ensure health care is not only available but genuinely accessible. Behind each statistic is a person, a family and a community. For too long many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have been overlooked by the healthcare system. Clause 6 ensures that where someone lives or where they are does not determine the health care they receive.

Tehreem LUGMANI: While the government recognises that improving healthcare outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, particularly in rural communities, is an objective that deserves our full support, it is obvious that clause 6 fails to provide clear, practical pathways to achieve that goal. Instead it leaves significant questions surrounding implementation, resource allocation and long-term effectiveness unanswered. Clause 6.5 proposes specialised hospital wards, and while culturally safe health care is essential, creating separate wards may not be the most effective use of limited rural hospital resources. Many rural hospitals already face capacity constraints regarding staff, beds and an increasing number of patients. Dedicating resources to specialised wards may place additional pressure on hospitals that are already operating at full capacity. It would be like adding fuel to the fire. Additionally, clause 6.1 mentions expanding and creating new ACCHOs, which comes across as vague. How will the government determine whether these commitments can be effective? Clause 6 seems to have the right heart but not the right structure, risking being symbolic rather than transformative, and that is why the government cannot support this bill.

Sarbjeeet SINGH: Firstly, as someone who is from a regional area and has experienced health care and the difficulties with it, I would like to commend the team's effort for putting together such a fantastic bill. I think it is much needed. I would also like to address the comments from the government calling this bill ambitious, yet what they have offered is wrapping paper with no real gift. They have not offered any real solution to it. Ambitious does not mean the bill is bad. Ambitious does not mean that regional and rural communities do not deserve better, and it does not mean that we should ignore our healthcare system. Ambitious means more doctors and more nurses. Ambitious means more jobs, more resources and more placements. It means inclusivity. After all, none of us would be here if we were not ambitious. This is a much-needed bill because regional and rural communities matter. People matter. Their lives matter. Our healthcare system matters.

Komal GILL: The opposition has proposed mandatory placements of student doctors in rural areas. As I am sure the opposition would be aware, these placements are unpaid. This side of the house acknowledges the burden of a lack of accessibility for rural and regional citizens. Increasing student doctors in these areas undoubtedly relieves this burden but not without the cost of financial and personal burdens for student doctors. The redistribution of the burden is not an adequate solution and most certainly is not the long-term solution that the opposition claims this bill to be. Another key point that has been overlooked by the opposition is the capacity of these hospitals in rural and regional areas. This has clearly been identified by the opposition; however, they have failed to consider how the inadequate capacity of these hospitals will be able to cater for the proposed increased number of student doctors. A key clause of this bill is the implementation of a rural telehealth program. This idea is excellent in an ideal world. Rural locations are typically subject to unreliable

internet access. How can this clause successfully achieve its goal when it is unlikely to consistently be accessible? Overall this bill puts forward an extraordinary idea. However, they have failed to demonstrate an insightful and adequately detailed plan for execution. For this reason the government has no choice but to label this bill as all but a dream.

Angelica Febriola EUGINIA: Today I would like to give my own testimony of living in a rural area with limited access to specialist doctors. My mother works at an aged care facility caring for over 50 residents who often require intensive care, sometimes at very random times of the day. Residents who have a plethora of health issues, which is mostly the case, have to constantly rely on onsite nurses, all of whom are limited to general practice regardless of their rigorous training. Imagine being over the age of 70, having no family to rely on and having to potentially wait for an extended amount of time until the external specialists get to where you live. I urge the house to consider how crucial the implementation of clauses 4 and 7 would be in ensuring that the wellbeing of rural patients is not neglected. Perhaps the government needs to consider the fact that both clauses can work in tandem. For example, if student doctors do choose to take a rural placement and are in need of extra assistance, they can perhaps receive this assistance via telehealth consultations. The possibilities really are endless, but the government just needs to keep an open mind.

Mahi DESAI: The opposition argues that the telehealth program helps save lives, as individuals are able to access help from their nearest hospital remotely, and higher risk patients they are able to provide a monitoring device at their home. However, what happens when there are patients who have serious incidents that require immediate support? Do they have to wait for the supervising medical support officer? Instead of implementing new technology, the opposition should be focusing on the source of the problem first. Moreover, what about senior citizens? Most senior citizens are not used to advanced technologies such as the monitoring device. What do they do when they need immediate support? Furthermore, the opposition has stated that any individual who has low-risk problems is able to call for help. However, what happens if an individual describes their symptoms wrongly? Would that not just place the patient at risk? These questions are once again not answered.

Thomas CURKOWSKYJ: It is not very often we get a bill that strengthens the regions in this house. In fact we have only had I think about two or three in total. This is a bill that will improve transparency within our medical sector. It will produce regular audits that anyone in the public can see and scrutinise the government over. If nothing else I think this is a very, very powerful tool that will keep us up to date and to account. The wonderful member before just spoke about how elderly patients may not be able to get specialist treatment, because they are not fluent with technology, but the good thing is that existing technology still exists and the vast majority of elderly patients already know how to use it – like Triple Zero, for example. We are making access to Triple Zero better with the RARE program, the rural ambulance response enhancement. It will reduce ambulance waiting times, and as we all know, every second counts in an emergency; it will improve the quality of care that regional patients receive; and it will give up-to-date and modern equipment to paramedics living out in our regions.

Helel BEIROUTI: I am sorry, but I need to address the point that was just made. Those opposite have just said that this will reduce ambulance waiting times, but as far as I am concerned, this bill does not say that we are going to magically make car traffic disappear.

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

Vishnu EASWAR: As stated previously by my colleagues, this bill was created on one simple principle: health care should not depend on postcodes. Throughout this debate we have heard about medical students, specialist access, emergency response, telehealth and culturally safe health care. But at the heart of each and every one of these points is a very simple truth: rural and regional Victorians are being asked to accept barriers that metropolitan Victorians often do not face. They are asked to travel further, they are asked to wait longer and they are asked to rely on fewer doctors, fewer specialists and stretched emergency services. When health care is delayed, the consequences are not small: illnesses worsen, families suffer, hospitals become overloaded and lives are put at risk. This bill does not claim that one single measure will fix every single problem; instead it recognises that rural health care inequality must be tackled from each and every direction. It builds the future workforce through rural placements; it supports doctors through residency and specialist pathways; it strengthens ambulance response services, because in emergencies, minutes matter; it expands telehealth, because distance should not block access to care; and it supports Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health care, because access must also mean trust, respect and cultural safety. The opposition may argue and they have

argued, as the lead opposition speaker said, that this bill is ambitious. But ambition is not a weakness when the issue is urgent. Rural communities have waited long enough for action that matches the seriousness of the issue. Rural Victorians are not asking for special treatment; they are asking for the same chance to be treated equally, protected and cared for. This is why this disparity must end, and this bill is how we begin.

The ACTING SPEAKER: The question is:

That the Increased Resourcing in Rural Areas for Hospitals and Ambulance Services Bill 2026 be now read a second and a third time.

Motion agreed to.

Read second time.

Read third time.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Just in closing, I want to again say thank you all for being here. One comment I would absolutely like to make is that I believe our state is in very good hands when I look at you wonderful people in the chamber today. Thank you and congratulations.

Sitting suspended 2:59 pm until 3:36 pm.

Closing ceremony

Council members entered chamber.

Welcome

The ACTING SPEAKER (Joel Hallinan): Good afternoon, everyone. I know it has been a very big week, and it is a very big last hour, so thank you for all the work you have done. For those I have not met, my name is Joel. I am the serjeant-at-arms here in the lower house, and this is a very unusual experience, because usually we are seen and not heard when we are in this chamber. So talking in here is very weird for me, so I will keep it very short.

Like I said, everyone has done a really big job. We will get through these ceremonial parts recognising all the work you have done. I know a lot of the taskforce and everyone else is very proud of the effort you have put in this week. I will move things along, because there are the people who do come into this place and are seen and heard, so I will introduce the first of those now, who will talk through a few things with you. Please welcome Kathleen Matthews-Ward, member for Broadmeadows.

Kathleen MATTHEWS-WARD: To begin, I acknowledge the Wurundjeri and pay my respects to their elders past and present and any First Nations people here today. I would also like to acknowledge Your Excellency Scarlet Lee the Youth Governor of Victoria and Brad Rowsell the Shadow Minister for Education, also a Youth Parliament alumni, I understand. I also acknowledge other MPs who have chaired over the course of this program – I know many of us love being part of the energy and the ideas in here – Alexandra Ash, CEO of the Y Victoria; Mick and all the YMCA staff; the Youth Parliament leaders; the press gallery members; Joel, whose voice I do not think I had ever heard before today; all of the Parliament house staff who give up their time to make sure you guys have got the opportunities you need to become our leaders of the future; and family and friends who have supported these young people every step of the way.

It really has been an honour to hear so many of you speak today. People often worry about our youth, but today you all showed us that our future is in good hands. There were some fabulous bills presented and really thoughtful contributions, and I could see the close collaboration that had happened within the teams writing those bills. You could see how many people had contributed to them, how well thought out they were, and the generation of ideas that I think you all should be very proud of. And I do not say this often, but I was also really impressed by the opposition teams, who had clearly done their homework and put forward some great points and excellent contributions as well. And I know it is really hard, because I think the bills were quite outstanding, to be honest, but to speak against something you fundamentally agree with is quite challenging. So really well done to everyone, both the government representatives and the opposition representatives.

I think for democracy the Westminster system is probably one of the best systems in the world, but you showed it at its best. We do not always see it at its best. It was well informed, well prepared, but even better, you were very respectful to each other. I heard ‘hear, hears’ from over here when people over here were speaking. You do not hear that very often. I saw people vote with their conscience. I saw people’s minds change depending on the debate. I often sit in here and wonder if there is a better way we can do things, if we could be more collaborative, if we could consider more people’s views in the room and access more of the vast expertise that comes from over 100 people elected from all fields and all corners of Victoria. I truly believe the best decisions are made when many and varied voices are heard, and I really love the diversity in this room today. I hope this is how our Parliament looks in the future: a true representation of Australia, a place where the contributions of all of us are valued, whether our ancestors have been here for 60,000 years, 160 years, 60 years, or whether you arrived here six years or six months ago, and I want to see many of you sitting here in the future. I also want to see more people with disabilities. So many of you know how important the spoken word and the written word are, but there are plenty of people who have got a lot to offer who do not have talents in those areas. We need to make sure that they are heard as well.

There are also so many ways you can change the world. I love being an MP and representing my wonderful community in the north, making sure they are heard and strongly advocated for, but I also loved my time as a councillor in local government. There were 11 of us. You get to make very tangible changes in your local community: new libraries, parks, pools, youth centres and quality services for older people, children and new mothers and fathers. They were some of the things I loved doing, and we were all closely involved in those decisions. I also loved my time as a policy adviser, where you could make really specific change in a particular area. I worked in aged care and disability policy, and I am really proud of the changes we were able to make in those policy areas. You can work closely with the department and access all that expertise there. There was a question in the upper house today from one of the youth parliamentarians, who asked, ‘How do we know you are basing decisions on facts?’ We do rely on the people in the department who write the legislation, but we add our representation. We add the voices of our people to that and make sure that things that have not been thought of are well thought through or represented. Departments do not always get it right. That is why we have got the separation of powers and all the things we do. I also got to make a lot of changes as a volunteer in many different organisations. As I said, public servants make a big difference to policy and legislation too. It is not just sitting in here where you make change. There are so many places where you can make change. I want to see all of you – I think all of you will – contribute to a better Australia.

It will be my absolute honour to accept the bills today on behalf of the government, and I look forward to advocating for many of the changes you have suggested to my fellow members of Parliament and government leaders. You covered all of the big issues: multiculturalism, education, health, mental health, gambling harm, online safety, children in care, youth justice, housing and transport. All of them are really close to my heart. When the Youth Governor hands the complete set of passed bills to me as the government representative, they will be distributed to the Victorian government and its ministers. I want you to know that these bills do not disappear into a drawer. They are read, considered and shared with ministers whose portfolios they relate to. Your ideas genuinely help shape conversations in government. You have shown us what matters to young people too: safer roads, better education, stronger communities, fairer systems and a future where everyone belongs.

It has been a real pleasure to be here with you. Each of you have contributed something meaningful, thoughtful and impressive over the past week. You have shown us what leadership looks like when young people are given the space to speak, to question and to imagine something better. The quality of your arguments, your research, your collaboration and your confidence were outstanding. You debated with respect, listened to each other and showed genuine curiosity. We could all use more of that in politics: listening, asking, being curious about the other person, sitting down and having a cup of tea and understanding where people are coming from. Young people are our future, but you are also very much our present. When we listen to you, celebrate you and take your ideas seriously, we shape a future that is better for everyone. One of the things I admire most about young people is how naturally they practise inclusion. You value hearing everyone’s story. You make space for people who might otherwise be overlooked. You show kindness, generosity and leadership without needing a title or a microphone. You have debated, collaborated, challenged each other and grown. You have shown courage, creativity and conviction. You have made your mark, and you should be very proud. Congratulations to you all.

Members applauded.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Thank you very much, Kathleen. Please, everyone, join me in welcoming Brad Rowswell, Shadow Minister for Education.

Brad ROWSWELL: Good afternoon, everyone. To Your Excellency Scarlet, the Youth Governor; to the CEO of Y Australia, Alex Ash; to Kathleen Matthews-Ward, my parliamentary colleague; to the YMCA Victoria team, especially a couple of people in the room whom I once did Youth Parliament with – Greg is out the back and Della is up there, but I have got to mention those guys because I have a genuine place in my heart for them; to all the volunteers at the Y; to the parliamentary staff who have contributed; to guests, family and friends; and, most importantly, to the 2026 class of the Victorian Youth Parliament: congratulations. Two really important things happened in 1985. It was the first year of the Victorian Youth Parliament. The other thing that happened in 1985 is this young fella named Brad was born at Sandringham Hospital. For 40 years, which is a remarkable milestone – anyone who wishes to suggest, ‘No, you don’t look 40, Brad,’ is welcome to do so now – for four decades, this program has been developing young leaders, building confidence, teaching the art of respectful debate and, above all, reminding young Victorians that democracy is not something you simply inherit, it is something that you actively need to participate in.

Standing here today is particularly special because, as has been mentioned, I was once sitting in exactly the spot that in fact you are in now, Leader of the Opposition. But please do not tell Jess Wilson that. I know what it is like to prepare a speech late into the night, to wonder whether your argument will stack up under scrutiny, to negotiate amendments, to speak in this chamber for the first time – which was not in fact the first time I spoke, when I was elected as a member of Parliament – to discover that the hardest part of politics is not making a speech; it is really convincing others that you have a good idea that is worthy of support. The experience you are taking away from this week is one that very few young people ever have. You have seen firsthand that democracy is more than question time clips on social media and it is more than the headlines in the evening news; it is about listening, negotiating, persuading, compromising and sometimes even changing your own mind. Those are valuable lessons not just for politics but for life.

Looking through the bills debated this week I was struck by the breadth of issues that matter to you. You tackled issues like health care in rural Victoria, emergency housing, multicultural inclusion, AI and social media, mental health, public transport safety, support for children in care, gambling harm and youth justice, among many other issues. Whether or not everyone agreed with every proposal is not really the point. The point is that you cared enough to research difficult issues, to develop solutions and to stand up in this place or in the other place and argue your belief. That is what matters. One of the greatest challenges facing democracies around the world is cynicism, in my view. Too many people have concluded that their voices do not matter or that participating will not actually make a difference, but members of this Youth Parliament have demonstrated otherwise. You have shown that young people are prepared to engage thoughtfully, respectfully and constructively with the issues that shape our communities. Victoria needs more of that.

As Shadow Minister for Education I often say that education is not simply about preparing young people for exams or employment; it is about preparing young people for life – to be fully engaged citizens. Programs like this do exactly that. They teach leadership, resilience, teamwork and public speaking, and perhaps most importantly they teach that believing something because someone told you it was true is fraught and shallow. Above all else I hope that this week has taught every one of you to put critical thinking into practice. Asking why does not mean you intend to undermine something; it means you are open to understanding something with greater depth and ownership.

Of course none of this would be possible without the extraordinary people behind the scenes. To YMCA Victoria, the volunteers, the mentors, the parliamentary staff again, the schools and youth organisations, the families and everyone in the gallery today who participated in this program, I say thank you. For 40 years you have helped shape generations of young Victorians who leave here with greater confidence and a stronger belief in their ability to contribute.

And to the youth parliamentarians, I would like to leave you with this thought: if you are ever told that you are a leader of the future, I hope that in response you say to that person, ‘Go and get stuffed,’ because they are wrong. They are wrong – every one of you are the leaders that our community needs today. And by your participation in this program, you have demonstrated just that. So whatever path you take at the conclusion of this program, I hope that you never lose the curiosity, optimism and willingness to step forward that brought you here this week. Our state needs people who do not simply identify problems but who are prepared to work

together to solve them. It needs people who can disagree without being disagreeable. It needs people who understand that leadership is about service. So in conclusion, I say congratulations for all you have achieved. Congratulations to the YMCA for 40 outstanding years of the Victorian Youth Parliament program and thank you also for giving me the opportunity to return, not as a participant this time but as someone whose own journey was shaped by this very remarkable program.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Thank you very much, Brad. Something good happened in 1986 as well, but I will leave that. I am sure you do not need my encouragement to welcome Alexandra Ash, CEO of YMCA Australia.

Alexandra ASH: Well, then we could go to 1988, so we will keep rolling through in terms of all our birth years. But first of all I would like to acknowledge the traditional owners of the lands where we are today, the Wurundjeri people of the Kulin nation, and pay respects to their elders past, present and emerging.

Now, I am going to go through a lot of thankyou's, which is really important, because there are so many people here that are supporting each other throughout this time. I acknowledge Her Excellency Scarlet Lee as well. Well done. It was awesome to meet you last year and then back here again. We have Kathleen Matthews-Ward and also Brad Rowsell, so thank you so much for being supporters, as well as youth parliamentarians and press gallery members, the Youth Parliament volunteer taskforce and very special guests around the room.

Forty years is what we said. Thank you for all the support and involvement of anyone that has come across this program in those 40 years. When I was speaking last year, the late and wonderful Marcia Pallet was here. She is the co-founder and was proud to be in the audience at that time. Thank you to her husband Richard for his continued support, and thank you, Marcia, and we are so grateful for the legacy that you have left. At the time Marcia was president – and the first ever female president of Y Victoria – the then CEO Dave Davis was also the co-founder, and he is now in his 90s. I do not want to guess his birth year around everyone else's.

The power of the week: that is why we are here. This week marks the culmination of months of hard work. We see that it is not just the time that we have here, it is researching, it is collaborating and it is debating. You have stepped into this chamber with courage and clarity, sharing your vision for a better Victoria. Your bills will soon be in the hands of government, as we explained before, to be reviewed, considered and ultimately help inform future public policy.

As we reflect on the real needs that have been here and debated through – and there has been a list and engagement in the prior speakers, but just to name a couple – the 20 bills debated this week tackled issues, as we said, young people deeply care about: access to housing and impact on communities, as such. For one generation to step into the next, the landscape has really shifted, and if we do not address that, it is the impact that we are going to feel for a very long time – young people matter. So as we go through that and behind them, as you have seen, there are so many impressive debates, responses and items that matter, because Youth Parliament drives change.

Youth Parliament, though, is so much more than the bills. Yes, they are super important, but if we look at last year's evaluation of the participants in the program, 97 per cent of you last year said that you felt like you had a voice and therefore were connected and belonging. We also see that 90 per cent of that cohort reported an increase in self-confidence, but it is not just that: it is the friendships that have lifelong connection, which was discussed this afternoon already. There are six participants in this program that will be joining National Youth Parliament in Canberra. This is the first year that we have had every state and territory across the nation plus National Youth Parliament being active. Young people's voices really do matter, and we are supporting them nationwide.

As I get to the thankyou's, on behalf of the Y, thank you to the President and the Speaker for allowing us access to this beautiful and wonderful space where countless debates and decisions have been made and shaped for this wonderful state of Victoria, which I am so proud to live in. We would also like to thank the members of Parliament who have supported the program, not just now but in previous years. To the Parliament of Victoria staff, especially the clerks, and everyone who helped to make this possible, thank you; to the Victorian Electoral Commission, thank you for your ongoing support and commitment, because building civic engagement of young people, as I have said, is vital for our future and for now, with young people being leaders.

To the volunteer taskforce led by Kaitlin Woolford, your energy and dedication have been absolutely incredible. We recognise all the extra work, the events, the bringing together and the very special piece this year with the 40th year celebration. Kaitlin is handing over the reins after two incredible years in the role. I want to genuinely thank you, Kaitlin, for your leadership, your drive and your passion to make this program and the experience possible and where it is. I hope Kaitlin comes into the Y Australia office from time to time, and I hope I still get to see her through that time as well.

Most importantly, as I have saved for the end, to every youth parliamentarian and also press gallery member, congratulations on what you have achieved across your journey with the program. We have seen incredible bills presented and wonderful speeches made, and change across Victoria comes with your beaming smiles and your essence of life. I said this last year when I was here, when I had my nine-year-old son, who was eight at the time, with me. Today I have got my six-year-old daughter, and she is able to see that this is possible for her as a female voice as well. I am so excited for 10 years from now, or so, when she might be here as well. I hope that it has been an unforgettable experience. Every year when I look at Youth Parliament, I am just in awe. I hope it inspires you to keep shaping a better tomorrow, because many around us need it. Thank you.

Members applauded.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Thank you very much, Alex. I would like to invite the youth leaders of each house to speak and pass their appreciation on to the parliamentary staff.

Helel BEIROUTI: Congratulations, everyone. We did it, and we did it in style. Thank you to everyone at the Parliament of Victoria for making this program and our experience possible. A special thankyou to the Speaker and the President for the use of the chambers and buildings and to the house departments staff, especially Richard, Joel, Juliana, Tom and Hannah. Another thankyou to Hansard and broadcast, catering, security, IT and cleaning. Thank you to all the members of Parliament for generously giving up their holidays to chair debates and hear the voices of young people. If I could give one last piece of advice as the Youth Premier, I would say: carpe diem, everyone.

Zeinab ABDU: Good afternoon all. I am Zeinab, the Leader of the Opposition in the Legislative Assembly. Over the course of this program I have seen and experienced the sheer power and dedication of our youth. I would like to extend a thankyou to the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing for their generous funding contribution to the program each year and to their staff for their ongoing support. Thank you also to the Victorian Electoral Commission for sponsoring multiple teams to participate in the program and access this experience. Your ongoing commitments that you provide this program allow more bright Victorians, like the ones in this very room, to understand their role in civics and how they can influence and shape their communities, allowing for a greater youth-led tomorrow. Once again, thank you.

Bodhi COLLINS: My name is Bodhi, and I am the Leader of the Government in the Legislative Council. Thank you to the team at YMCA Victoria. Your commitment to this program demonstrates your belief in the power of inspired young people. Thank you to all of the teams that have made this program and experience possible, including the youth services team and the Lake Dewar Discovery Camp team. If I have one word of advice for people doing the program next year, I will say: be courageous and stay true to yourselves.

Hamayle ASMAT: Hello, everyone. My name is Hamayle. I am the Leader of the Opposition in the Legislative Council. I would like to say thank you to the incredible Youth Parliament taskforce. This group of amazing young people have stopped at nothing to provide a positive and empowering outcome and experience for all of us participants. This group started working in October last year and have collectively donated more than 6500 hours to this program. On behalf of every single participant in the program, we thank you for your hard work and for making this experience meaningful, memorable and transformational. Let us give them a round of applause.

Members applauded.

Presentation of best speaker awards

The ACTING SPEAKER (Joel Hallinan): Thank you very much, youth leaders. That was very well spoken, as many of you have spoken very well over the course of this week. I will take this chance myself to give a big thankyou to Hannah McIntosh in my office, who is over here and who has been so instrumental in

putting the week together from the Parliament side. I will let Richard, my colleague, talk about the people on the Council side who have done the same thing, but I will also say a big thankyou to everyone in the TCSU on the Assembly side, who have been really helpful getting everything set up, and of course to the catering team and cleaners as well.

Richard and I have a really great pleasure now. Throughout the course of the week, MPs have been chairing debates and the parliamentary staff have been clerking them, and we have been listening very carefully to your contributions and submitting votes on who has been giving the best speeches across all the debates. We have tallied them up, and Richard and I are very pleased now to present a couple of awards for the best speakers in each house.

I will mention first that in the Legislative Assembly there were a lot of very good speeches, given votes spread across a lot of different speakers. I would like to give a special mention to the runner-up in the best speaker competition, Evangeline Flynn. Congratulations to the winner of the best speaker in the Legislative Assembly this year, Thomas Curkowskyj.

Members applauded.

Thomas CURKOWSKYJ: Thanks. I am a bit nervous, because I did not prepare this at all. I did not even know this was happening. I want to make a really, really deep, warm thankyou to Sheepy and to all of the amazing people who have been on the Youth Parliament team. This has been the experience of a lifetime for me, and this is probably my greatest and proudest moment. Thank you so much.

Richard WILLIS: On behalf of the Legislative Council, I firstly want to thank the staff that were involved. I did not do much myself; it was all Tom Mills over there and Juliana, who does not work on a Thursday. Thanks you to Juliana and Tom for all their hard work. Mick Delaney, where are you? He has gone out of the room. Mick Delaney has been part of this for almost half of the 40 years, and I have been involved with Mick for quite a long period of that time as well. Thanks, Mick, for all of your work. Youth Governor, great job for the past year – and also this week especially. Well done and congratulations. Taskforce members, you have been terrific.

I want to give a few honourable mentions, not necessarily to runners-up but to those three people who were excellent in all their speeches and contributions and recorded a high number of votes. Those that I want to mention are Rayhan Pasha, who does a very good Donald Trump impersonation; James Dyer; and the last honourable mention – I mean, they have all been terrific – is Jack Nguzo. Jack and his stylish jackets have been a bit of a style icon this week.

I want to say that the best speaker in the Council for the week – congratulations – is Mahek Badwal.

Mahek BADWAL: I do not know what to say. This is interesting, a first time for everything. Thank you to everyone. Thank you to Youth Parliament. Thank you to Sheepy. Thank you to all of the YP staff and team.

I think something I have noticed about Youth Parliament is that it is not only just a stepping platform for us to show our ideas and talk but to demonstrate how the youth understands that even in politics, articulation and collaboration are important. What I found very interesting as an avid philosophy reader is, like past republics – there is a book called Plato's *Republic*. People voted for things, and people voted based on what they thought, not just because it was a part of their side or because it was the opposition and you cannot vote for that. They thought for themselves. I think that is a very important thing that we must do in this current society. There are so many loud voices right now, and often it is hard to understand and articulate for yourself. So seeing everyone do that this whole week has been amazing, and I hope you all continue that.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Congratulations to the winners. Congratulations to everyone who gave speeches across the week. It is a hard thing to do, and you should all be proud of yourselves. I now welcome up to the stage Their Excellency Scarlet Lee, Youth Governor of Victoria.

Handing over of bills

Scarlet LEE (Youth Governor): Good afternoon and welcome to our closing ceremony for the 2026 Youth Parliament. Before I begin I would like to acknowledge the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung people of the Kulin

nation, on whose lands we meet today. I would like to pay my respects to their elders past and present and extend my respects to any Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander people who are here today.

I would like to thank the member for Broadmeadows the Honourable Kathleen Matthews-Ward, the Shadow Minister for Education the Honourable Brad Rowswell and the CEO for YMCA Australia Alexandra Ash for their speaking contributions this afternoon. I would also like to thank Richard Pallet for his devoted attendance to every single sitting day of Youth Parliament. Your presence is so warm and so appreciated within this space. I would also like to emphasise the tremendous effort and success of our taskforce. These people give countless hours of their free time, all in the name of uplifting and supporting our young people. Our taskforce is comprised entirely of volunteers, volunteers who cherish this program and the young people within it. This program simply would not hold the prestige that it does without the merit of our taskforce.

I am now deeply honoured to present all of the 18 successful bills from our youth parliamentarians on behalf of the Victorian Youth Parliament to the honourable member Kathleen Matthews-Ward on behalf of the government. I hold within my hands the voices of our youth. I feel forever grateful that I have been entrusted with something this precious.

Bills presented.

Members applauded.

Scarlet LEE: I would like to highlight our exceptional participants. To say that we as a Youth Parliament community could not be prouder feels inconsequential given the exceptional performance of our young people throughout this week. This week you represented yourselves, your peers and all young people across Victoria. This was abundantly clear from the dedication to not only this program but each other. This week you cheered each other on, you stepped in to support your fellow parliamentarians and you walked side by side to create something far greater than yourselves. The bonds that you have formed at Youth Parliament are lifelong and they are far beyond surface level. You as a cohort of young people have good hearts and act out of compassion. Over the duration of this program I have seen all of you flourish within yourselves, but also as the leaders of today you led teams and chambers, you built strong friendships and you established yourselves as capable change makers. These are your people. You are amongst those who lead with their hearts, something that is incredibly sought after and admirable.

Naming of 2027 program director

Scarlet LEE (Youth Governor): I will now be announcing our 2027 program director, but first I would like to recognise our current program director, Kaitlin Woolford, or as we all know and love her, Sheepy. Kaitlin has spent 10 years in Youth Parliament, growing and changing with our beloved program. For me there is no Youth Parliament without Sheepy. She has been a constant in this program for as long as I remember and will continue to be, whether she would care to admit it or not. I know I and years' worth of the taskforce have learnt and laughed with Kaitlin, gaining skills and lessons that last a lifetime. Kaitlin's impact has made a permanent change within our program. I say from the heart and on behalf of Youth Parliament: thank you, Sheepy.

With that being said, I am honoured to be able to announce our next program director. This person has shown time and time again their extensive knowledge of the program and their innate ability to lead. This person acts as an anchor for the people around them. They are a stable presence and intrinsically allow their team the same grounding. I can only look forward to what our new director is able to achieve given the immense impact that they have already made so far. With that, I would like to announce the 2027 Youth Parliament program director: Anna Scott.

Members applauded.

Naming of 2027 Youth Governor

Scarlet LEE (Youth Governor): I still have more to say – calm down. I feel incredibly honoured to be your 40th Youth Governor of Victoria. It has simply brought me all the joy in the world to be able to represent 40 years of inspired and talented young people. However, all good things must come to an end. I have had many people ask me if I am upset about my role coming to a close, to which I respond, 'Not even a little bit.' I cannot describe the honour it has been to work alongside the immensely prestigious young people within this

program, and no amount of sadness or nostalgia could overpower that feeling. I am also aware that our next Youth Governor was elected by these young people, who I trust wholeheartedly. With that, I introduce our new Youth Governor, someone who is reasonable and articulate, who is incredibly driven and who has a vision which I do not doubt they will be able to achieve. This person will serve our young people well. I would like to announce our 2027 Youth Governor: Aimee Ablett.

Members applauded.

Aimee ABLETT: Oh my God, thank you guys so much – sorry, I am very emotional – for trusting me with such an honourable, prestigious position. I hope I can live up to all that Scarlet has done. Thank you so much to my fellow candidates that also went for it. Without you guys as taskforce supporting me to get to this point I really could not have done this. All of you guys are amazing. Thank you so much.

Scarlet LEE: I now declare our 2026 Youth Parliament closed.

Youth Parliament adjourned 4:15 pm.