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Newsletter # 40

Hello –

It's an election year in Victoria and Parliament is back, sitting last week and again next week.

My enduring goal is to make our communities fair, just and safe, and I'm pleased to let you know that Victoria last week took another step towards this when Derryn Hinch's Justice Party successfully changed criminal procedure legislation to help people harmed by crime.

Fellow MP Stuart Grimley and I put three amendments to the government's bill. We succeeded with two, ensuring Parliament agreed to deliver important rights for victims first recommended by the Victorian Law Reform Commission six years ago. You can read about these just improvements to the court process in the next item.

We're working to enhance community safety. We're keeping pressure on the government to make sure Ambulance Victoria is properly resourced in regional communities. In Northern Victoria, it's taking 19:26 minutes for an ambulance to get to an emergency. That's almost 90 seconds longer than a year ago. And two years on from the Black Saturday bushfire disaster, we're asking when our vital cross-border emergency services will be able to communicate seamlessly in a disaster.

Last week, in our party's submission to the Treasurer for budget consideration, I also sought the government's commitment to level up education and housing opportunities for young people at risk of homelessness in Wodonga and Wangaratta. I think the Education First Youth Foyer model would provide a fair start for young people in this situation.

You can always follow what I'm up to in Northern Victoria and Parliament at taniamaxwell.com.au or on my social media. In the meantime, please tell me where I can help you, and share your issues, ideas and comments with me by:

- Email tania.maxwell@parliament.vic.gov.au
- Direct message on [Facebook](#)
- Telephone 03 4700 1787 between 9:00am and 5:00pm weekdays

You're welcome to forward this newsletter to family and friends, too, and share it on your social media.

Thank you.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Tania', with a long, sweeping flourish extending from the end of the name.

February 18, 2022



Mount Buffalo common fringe lily - Thysanotus tuberosus

Victim rights amendments become law

Derryn Hinch's Justice Party is working for fair, just, safe communities.

Last week my colleague Stuart Grimley MP and I advanced Victoria's recognition of people harmed by crime when the Legislative Council passed two key changes to the government's criminal procedure legislation.

The Opposition and crossbench supported two of our three amendments to the Justice Legislation Amendment (Criminal Procedure Disclosure and Other Matters) Bill 2021.

These changes were first recommended to the government by the Victorian Law Reform Commission six years ago in a landmark review of the role of victims in criminal trials.

The first requires the Office of Public Prosecutions (OPP) to notify crime victims of their right to make a victim impact statement at an offender's sentencing.

The second compels the OPP and other crime agencies to inform victims of their right to compensation or restitution from a convicted offender, and to refer them to available legal help.

The third, endorsed by the Victims of Crime Commissioner, would have enabled victims to seek a review of an OPP decision to discontinue offender prosecution, or allow a serious offence to be plea-bargained to a lesser charge, and to be told of this right.

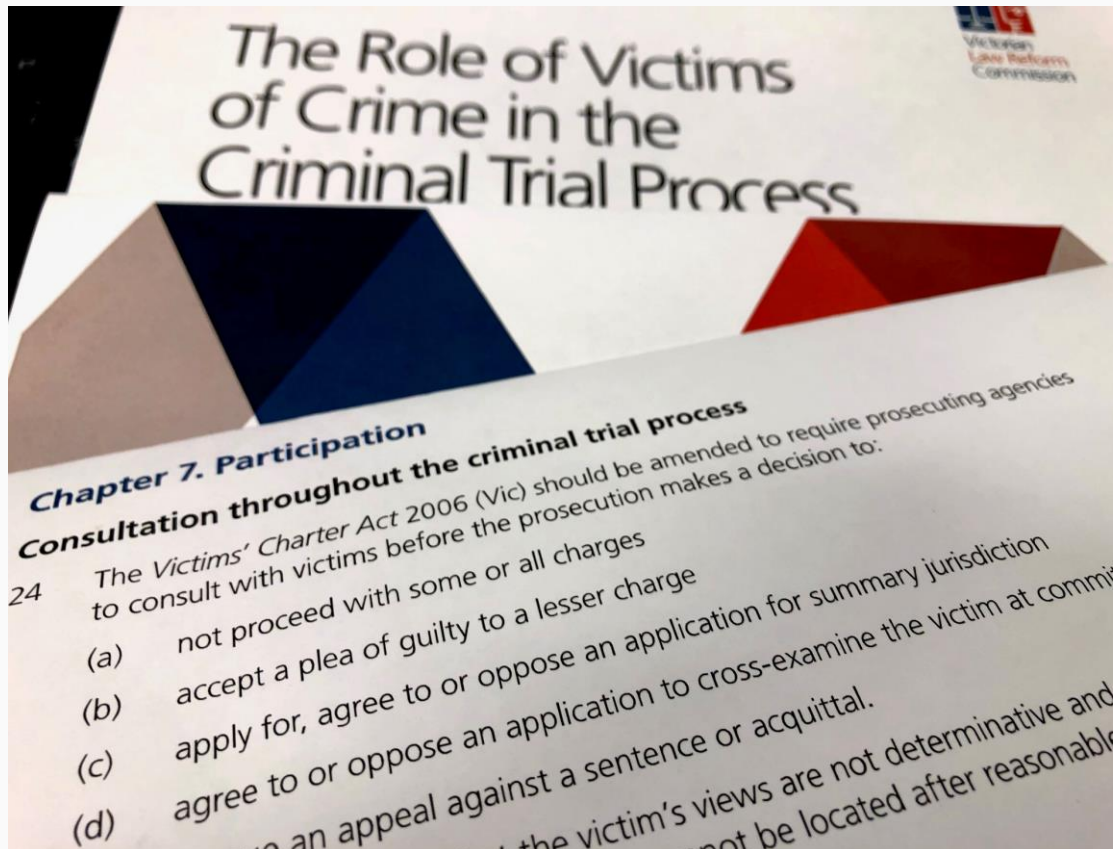
But the proposed right to a review was defeated on a tied vote, 18-18, when the Reason Party's Fiona Patten and Greens' Samantha Ratnam shifted their support to the government, which opposed the change, after the Animal Justice Party's Andy Meddick opposed each of the DHJP amendments.

Derryn Hinch's Justice Party will now be working hard to find another way for people harmed by crime to request a review when a prosecution is dropped or changed.

The enduring feedback I hear from victims of crime is that they feel let down and excluded from the justice process. They say we have a legal system, not a justice system, and this just compounds their trauma.

The Victims' Charter Act 2006 requires that victims' views are sought and that they are informed of decision-making. But victims are often informed of these decisions after they are done and there is no provision for victims to seek any form of review.

View my [speech](#) and read our [media statement](#).



A victim's right to review prosecution changes was recommended by the Victorian Law Reform Commission six years ago.

Government should explain ambulance roster delay

I welcome improved Ambulance Victoria emergency response times in Wangaratta, Towong, Indigo and Mount Alexander local government communities in the quarter ending December 31, 2021.

Code one call-out performance year-on-year improved 38 seconds in Wangaratta to 13:08 minutes, on average, in response to 506 calls.

In Indigo Shire, performance improved 1:22 minutes, to 21:50 minutes, for 180 calls, and 4:32 minutes in Towong Shire, to 25:48 minutes, for 75 calls - but these response times are still way too long when every minute counts.

In Mount Alexander Shire, another of the 27 local government areas in my electorate, performance was better by 48 seconds, to 18:24 minutes, for 217 calls.

But I'm very worried about the worsening performance shown by the latest data for Alpine, Campaspe, Gannawarra, Loddon, Macedon Ranges, Mansfield, Moira, Moorabool, Mitchell, Murrindindi, Nillumbik, Strathbogie, Swan Hill and Yarra Ranges shires, Wodonga and Whittlesea city council communities, and other areas.

I recognise that emergency call-out demand has ballooned as a result of COVID-19.

It's up 9.6 per cent for the year across Northern Victoria, and there's no doubt this has contributed to a 1:33-minute blow-out in average performance times.

A year ago, it took almost 18 minutes, on average, for an ambulance to arrive at a code one emergency call-out in Northern Victoria.

Now that average response time has expanded to 19:26 minutes.

These outcomes prompted me to ask Ambulance Services Minister Martin Foley MP to update Parliament about the government's \$10 million enterprise resource planning project, due for completion in June, to improve ambulance rostering.

I'm also meeting Ambulance Victoria acting Loddon Mallee regional director Amelia Kohn in Bendigo today.

Read my [statement](#).



Ambulance average emergency response times across 27 local government areas in Northern Victoria are 1:33 minutes longer than a year ago.

Pushing for seamless cross-border bushfire communications

Last week I asked Emergency Services Minister Jaclyn Symes when the government expects cross-border emergency services will be able to communicate seamlessly in a disaster.

In Parliament, I said incompatible emergency services radio networks between Victoria, New South Wales and South Australia made communication between border fire brigades “near impossible”.

In 2004, the Council of Australian Governments’ National Inquiry on Bushfire Mitigation and Management supported the alignment of emergency services’

communications between the states.

The 2020 Royal Commission into National Natural Disaster Arrangements report notes that little progress has been made in the 17 years since then.

Walwa CFA former brigade captain David Hanna recently noted that after 45 years in the CFA cross-border communication systems remain incompatible and requests for basic upgrades to equipment and facilities have been ignored.

Lack of action on this issue is, frankly, dangerous for border residents and hampers the tactical capacity of local emergency services.

Beechworth CFA captain Bruce Forrest, in evidence to the 2020 royal commission following the 'Black Summer' bushfires, said: "The Murray River is between you (and NSW Rural Fire Service brigades) but, bar getting out a waving, there's not really much you can do".

Legislative Council standing orders require questions to be answered within 14 days.

Read my [statement](#).



Beechworth CFA brigade captain Bruce Forrest. Image: Border Mail

Mildura, Bright, Wodonga and Wangaratta projects top \$77m budget submission

Derryn Hinch's Justice Party state leader Stuart Grimley MP and I last week met with Victorian Treasurer Tim Pallas to seek public investment of \$77.5 million in seven key health, education, justice, and infrastructure projects in Northern Victoria.

Major items we put forward for state budget consideration include \$35m for a Mildura drug court and alcohol and other drugs rehabilitation unit, and \$10.75m for the redevelopment and refit of Alpine Health's Bright hospital to meet the needs of a growing and ageing community.

A major study shows that re-offending can shrink by one third and offences become less serious in communities where drug courts operate. The impacts of drug use and related crime also drop in communities where rehabilitation services are available.

I've also asked for \$24.3m to fund Education First Youth Foyers in Wodonga and Wangaratta so young people between 16 and 24 experiencing or at risk of homelessness can take up education opportunities with a roof over their heads.

A five-year study has delivered clear evidence of the foyer model's success from the three that are already helping young people elsewhere in Victoria. It showed 85 per cent of participants had jobs or were continuing education a year after they left the campus and 75pc completed year 12-equivalent or higher learning when they were living there.

Other projects for which our party seeks funding include:

- \$5m to 'back the track' - matching federal funding for a review of the Murray Basin Rail project and removing 20,000 heavy vehicles from Sunraysia and Mallee roads.
- \$2.25m over three years for The Wodonga Project, bringing together the community, local schools and government agencies to help disadvantaged young people.
- \$50,000 a year to extend Benalla Rural City Council's Rural Outreach service supporting people in rural communities to find services and health and wellbeing advice.
- \$100,000 to help Strathbogie Shire Council and the Euroa community develop a business case for reuniting both sides of the town as a key outcome of major works on the federal government's Inland Rail project.

Read my Northern Victoria [submission](#).



Stuart Grimley (left), Treasurer Tim Pallas and me at our budget meeting in Parliament last week.

Last week in Parliament

February 8-10, 2022

New bills

[Alpine Resorts Legislation Amendment Bill 2022](#)

- Establishes Alpine Resorts Victoria to replace the Alpine Resort Management Boards and the Alpine Resorts Co-ordinating Council.

[Public Health and Wellbeing Amendment Bill 2022](#)

- Makes a range of amendments to the [Public Health and Wellbeing Act 2008](#), including changes to the regulation of labour hire accommodation, changes to the Chief Health Officer's powers to make examination and testing orders, and data collection and
-

analysis powers. The bill also provides a statutory immunity to the Chief Health Officer and certain other officers.

Passed the Legislative Assembly (goes to the Legislative Council)

- [Health Legislation Amendment \(Quality and Safety\) Bill 2021](#)
- [Livestock Management Amendment \(Animal Activism\) Bill 2021](#)
- [Regulatory Legislation Amendment \(Reform\) Bill 2021](#)

Passed the Legislative Council with amendment (goes to the Assembly for consideration)

- [Sex Work Decriminalisation Bill 2021](#)

Passed Parliament (goes to the Governor for royal assent)

- [Justice Legislation Amendment \(Criminal Procedure Disclosure and Other Matters\) Bill 2021](#)
- [Racing Amendment Bill 2021](#)

Party backs COVID-19 impact inquiry

Derryn Hinch's Justice Party MPs backed a fellow cross-bench parliamentarian's move last week to establish a Legislative Council inquiry into COVID-19 impacts on Victorians' physical and mental health.

I said our party had worked throughout the two-year pandemic to balance the public health response against the impact of business, social, school and travel restrictions on people and families in regional communities.

"It has been gloomy, but we have an obligation to consider how we can learn from this for future pandemics," I told Parliament, speaking to a motion put by Western Metropolitan independent Catherine Cumming MP on February 9 to establish the inquiry.

The Household Impacts of COVID-19 Survey, conducted monthly by the Australian Bureau of Statistics from March 2020 to June 2021, reported that groups with the highest levels of psychological distress were Australians

aged between 18 and 34, people living in Victoria and women.

The University of Melbourne conducted a weekly 'Taking the Pulse of the Nation' survey through the Melbourne Institute, where 20 per cent of respondents reported feeling depressed or anxious most or all of the time.

Employed parents whose youngest child was aged five to 11 years reported higher levels of mental distress than parents of other age cohorts. This tells a real story of how tough the stay-at-home and remote-learning requirements were on working parents with young children.

A national youth mental health survey by headspace in 2020 showed the proportion of young people feeling a lack of companionship during the first year of COVID increased to 54 per cent.

Other studies reported struggles with financial uncertainty, being constantly confronted with pandemic-related media reports, fear and uncertainty about accessing other health care, and uncertainty around more home-schooling.

Mental health is only one component of all this but something I am personally very passionate about.

We know our health system has faced some real challenges in other areas, including hospital ramping, ambulance response times, elective surgery, doctor shortages, workforce furlough, vaccination rollouts and much more.

And this certainly will not be our last pandemic.

We need to learn from the negatives and see the positives as well, responses that we can build and work on.

Dr Cummings' motion to set up the inquiry was defeated on a tied vote 18-18.



Traffic queued in Wodonga when border restrictions were in force from July 2020

Nurse-on-call

Nurse-on-call puts you directly in touch with a registered nurse for caring, professional health advice around the clock.

Call **1300 60 60 24** from anywhere in Victoria for free health advice, 24 hours a day.

If you think your situation is an emergency, you should always call **000** or go to a hospital emergency department.





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