



20th of November, 2020

Hi there,

Here's an update on politics and news across the Northern Metropolitan Region.

In this issue — legislation amended to enable victims to speak out, the inquiry into contact tracing commenced this week, RSL pokies are negatively impacting veterans, safety at the new Bell Station and COVID fines for children are unjust.

COVID-19 UPDATES:

So great to have 21 🌞🌞 days in a row today! Check [here](#) for the most up-to-date information and advice from Victoria's Chief Health Officer.



Letting victims speak

As a result of the [#LetUsSpeak](#) campaign, the government have moved to remedy the effects of legislation passed last year which had the unintended consequence of silencing victims of sexual abuse who wanted to speak out.

In my speech, I stressed the importance of a victim having agency in how their story is told, but this raised several issues when it came to deceased victims. In my view, the government had not achieved the right balance on this and many of my colleagues agreed. As a result, changes were made to the Bill, with the government undertaking to come back next year, following extensive consultation, with a more nuanced process for the families of deceased victims.

You can read or watch my speech [here](#).



Contact Tracing Inquiry begins

The [Parliamentary Inquiry into the Victorian Government's COVID-19 Contact Tracing System and Testing Regime](#), of which I am chair, held its first public hearings on Monday 16 November and Wednesday 18 November. Conducted by the Legislative Council Legal and Social Issues Committee, the inquiry will consider the capacity and fitness for purpose of the Victorian Government's COVID-19 contact tracing system and testing regime.

Through this inquiry we want to make sure that we have the best possible COVID-19 tracing and testing in Victoria, so that we can stay COVID safe in the months ahead.

We spoke with a wide cross-section of people, including business representatives, infectious diseases and contact tracing experts from Victoria and interstate, companies providing information technology and workforce solutions, medical and legal professionals, community sector representatives and health services.

Hearings continue next week and submissions to the inquiry can be made via an [online form](#). Any submissions made must address the specific focus of the inquiry.

We want to assess how well the COVID19 contact tracing system and testing regime are working and whether there are any improvements needed so that our community can be confident about the ongoing measures being taken to deal with this Virus.

With zero new cases and no deaths for 21 days, it's important that we undertake this work as quickly as possible to ensure we can keep those numbers down.

The Committee is required to present its report to Parliament by 14 December 2020.



Negative impacts of RSL pokies on veterans

The RSL was founded during World War I to help care for returning veterans. A hundred years later, these clubs are multimillion-dollar organisations.

In Victoria a large proportion of the RSL's annual income comes from electronic gaming machines — RSL pokies turned over \$260 million in revenue, but less than 4 per cent of

that revenue, \$9.8 million, went back into the community and veterans welfare.

We know that veterans are disproportionately represented in homeless populations, with higher rates of mental health issues, higher rates of drug and alcohol dependence and higher rates of gambling addiction.

There has been a concerted push by some younger members within the RSL to get pokies out of RSL clubs, arguing that it is not worth the return.

You can read or watch my question to the Minister for Veterans [here](#).



COVID fines for children is unfair

Last week in Parliament I asked the Minister for Police and Emergency Services to immediately rescind the COVID fines for people under the age of 18.

Victoria has implemented one of the strictest policing responses to COVID in the world, but unfortunately our policing is often plagued by a lack of transparency, racial bias is not monitored, and our fine review system is onerous and difficult to navigate even for lawyers.

Many people cannot afford to pay the amounts that we ask, especially children.

The Federation of Community Legal Centres, Financial Counselling Victoria and Victoria

Legal Aid produced a paper: *'Fairer Fines Outcome for Vulnerable Victorians During COVID-19 and the Recovery Phase'*, which gives the example of Sam. Sam, a 16-year-old refugee, experiences mental health issues and sees a trauma counsellor. Sam went for a walk with a friend and was approached by a third party, who started chatting to him. They were socially distancing. The police arrived and Sam tried to explain that he did not know this person, but the language barrier meant this was not clear to the police. They did not give Sam a warning or a direction to move on and instead took his details and sent him an infringement notice in the mail for failing to comply with the COVID-19 directions.

Less than 1000 people of the 19,000 who have been issued fines have paid them. I think it is obvious these fines are an inadequate justice instrument. We gain nothing from giving fines to children as it often only punishes their parents. We do not want children to graduate at 18 and go straight into the justice system because of COVID. We cannot let that happen.

You can read or watch my adjournment matter [here](#).



Improving safety at new Bell Station

I made an appeal to the Minister for Transport Infrastructure on behalf of the residents around the Bell Street station.

The [Bell Residents Group](#) have produced an earworm [video](#) to the tune of Go West. You

guessed it, they would like to see the location of the entrance to the new car park moved to the west.

The current plan has the car park entrance on the east side. Moving the car park entrance to the west will provide drivers with easier access from Bell Street and would also be better for cyclists and pedestrians, providing much safer walking routes from the precinct.

I asked whether the government would consider going west with the new Bell Street station car park entrance to keep the local area safer for children and reduce noise for residents.

You can read or watch my constituency question [here](#).



Walk Against Family Violence: 25th November

Make sure you join the [Walk Against Family Violence](#) next Wednesday.

Next week marks the start of 16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence, which runs from Wednesday, 25 November – the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women – until Thursday, 10 December.

Even though we can't walk together this year, your support is more important than ever. During the national shut down, calls to support service 1800 RESPECT saw a 66 per cent increase compared to the same period last year.

Register [here](#).

Be kind, stay home, wash your hands and enjoy your weekend!

Fiona Patten MP