

PARLIAMENT OF TASMANIA
HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY
HANSARD

Tuesday 19 May 2026

The Speaker, **Mrs Petrusma**, took the Chair at 10 a.m., acknowledged the Traditional People, and read Prayers.

[excerpt]

STATEMENT BY SPEAKER

Formal Apology - RA Rodda Museum of Pathology

[11.47 a.m.]

The SPEAKER - Before I give the call to minister Archer, I acknowledge the enduring distress, deep pain, grief, trauma, and anger that this matter has caused and continues to cause for families and loved ones. They also recognise that many in our community may also have these feelings and that today's motion may impact people both in parliament and those watching online. I therefore ask all members today to be please be cognisant of the potential impact of their words, their contributions are kept relevant to the motion before us and that other forms of the House are used to raise other matters of importance to you. To anyone in the parliament feeling overwhelmed, anxious or isolated today, please reach out for support as we have arranged for support to be on hand in this parliament for everyone today. For members of the public watching online, there are a range of free supports available including Access Mental Health, a support, triage and referral phone line delivered by the Tasmanian Department of Health, which operates 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Anyone in Tasmania can call Access Mental Health on 1800 332 388 for counselling support over the phone. Other supports include Lifeline on 13 11 14, or Beyond Blue on 1300 224 636.

FORMAL APOLOGY

RA Rodda Museum of Pathology

[11.49 a.m.]

Mrs ARCHER (Bass - Minister for Health, Mental Health and Wellbeing) - Honourable Speaker, I move -

That the House:

- (1) Recognises that, between 1966 and 1991, human organs and tissue samples obtained following coronial autopsies were stolen and held at the R.A. Rodda Museum of Pathology at the University of Tasmania, without the knowledge or consent of the deceased's senior next of kin or family members.
- (2) Acknowledges that these historical practices represented a serious failure to respect both the dignity of the deceased and the rights of families, and breached the trust placed in public institutions by the Tasmanian community.

- (3) Accepts shared responsibility for past failures of laws and policies of successive governments that did not prevent, identify, or address these historical practices.
- (4) Apologises for:
 - (a) The appalling historical practices which led to human remains being stolen and held at the R.A. Rodda Museum without the knowledge or consent of family members; and
 - (b) the enduring distress, anger, pain, grief, and trauma that many individuals and families have experienced, and continue to experience, because of these practices, including how these practices were disclosed, investigated, communicated, and acted upon by relevant authorities.
- (5) Affirms the need for the Tasmanian Government to continue to be transparent, accountable, and ethically responsible in all matters involving the care, custody, and dignity of human remains, with robust legal, clinical and governance safeguards in place to prevent any recurrence of such practices.

I speak to this motion to address a troubling and historical wrong enacted against Tasmanians spanning over three decades where 177 human remains from coronial autopsies were stolen and kept at the RA Rodda Museum of Pathology in Hobart without family or coronial knowledge or approval. Although these historical practices ended 35 years ago, the deep impact this has had on the families and loved ones of the deceased continues to this day.

It's important to remember that these were not just body parts or specimens or human remains. They were people. They were mothers, fathers, daughters, sons, brothers and sisters who were missed by their loved ones, and there is no doubt the pain of losing them has been exacerbated by what occurred later. It's important that as a government, as a parliament and as a community we recognise that.

As part of this apology, I would like to read out the names of those individuals who we have been able to identify and whose families have given their consent for me to do so:

Elaine Nellie King. David

William Maher. Elaine Elsie

Erskine. Anthony James Santi.

Amy Absolom-Harris. Damian

Lawrence Smith. Lewis John

Barnes.

William Arthur Williams. Gladstone

Frederick Williams. David

Bonnitcha.

Daniel Tiffin.

Cindy Tiffin.

Amedeo Minnucci.

Ramona Straatsma.

Reginald William Turvey. Susan

Kaye Pritchard.

William Caplice. Stanley Rex

Wignall. Kenneth Perry

Fulton. Dion Jarman.

Annette Joseph. Shane

Anthony Dale.

Peter Malcom Cleaver.

It's important to note that this is not a complete list, but if any additional families would like their loved ones recognised on the parliamentary record at any time in the future, I commit to updating the House to reflect that.

I acknowledge those in attendance today, including affected individuals and families, and those who have supported families through this difficult process.

These actions occurred within a broader system of governance and oversight that, at the time, failed to prevent, identify or address these practices. We acknowledge the shock, anger, grief, and trauma experienced by families on learning, often many years or decades later, that the remains of their loved ones had been stolen.

In many cases, families became aware of these matters through public processes, and some families were not able to make informed choices about how their loved one was laid to rest. Many families were also not provided with information as to why human organs or remains were stolen, and the absence of this information continues to compound grief and distress and has exacerbated the hurt and anger they feel. For many, this has caused renewed distress, disrupted the grieving process and damaged trust in institutions that should have acted with the utmost care, respect and integrity.

The experiences of pain, distress and loss are not the same for everyone. Each family's loss and each person's response is unique. Some have sought answers, some have sought accountability, some have sought only acknowledgement and respect. There is no single or expected response. All responses deserve to be met with care.

We recognise that no apology, however sincerely offered, can undo what has occurred, restore what was lost, or fully repair the harm caused. For many, this harm is ongoing, intergenerational, and immeasurable, and the knowledge that their loved ones were treated without dignity or respect continues to cause distress and harm. For some, this apology comes too late, and for others, it may not provide resolution or closure.

The Tasmanian government and the Tasmanian parliament unreservedly apologises to all individuals and families affected by the human organs and tissue samples stolen by forensic and hospital pathologists employed by the Department of Health and provided to the Rodda Museum. The institutional failures that enabled these practices and the harm caused can never be undone. We are sorry that your loved ones were not treated with the dignity and respect that they deserved. We are sorry that consent was not sought or obtained, and that your rights as families were not respected and that systems intended to protect families and uphold ethical standards failed to prevent, identify and stop these practices. We're also sorry that many families did not receive the support, guidance or information they needed at the time, and that this lack of support and clarity compounded an already distressing experience.

While delivering this apology is an important step, the responsibility to act with care, transparency and sensitivity does not conclude with the words spoken in this Chamber. Rather, it includes how affected individuals and families are treated beyond today, how concerns are listened to and how ongoing questions are addressed.

In that context, further investigative work has been undertaken by the Department of Health in recent months to identify, as far as possible, other pathologists who may have been involved in these practices during the relevant period. While this work has occurred within the limits of historical records, I can advise that in addition to Dr Royal Cummings, who was identified by the coroner's report, the investigation has found that five other individuals were likely involved; with four able to be fully identified and one partially. Of the individuals able to be fully identified, two are deceased. The findings of this internal investigation, including the details of those identified as likely being involved, have been provided by the Department of Health Secretary to the Director of Public Prosecutions for his consideration and to identify any possible further actions that can be taken to hold them accountable. I can advise that none of these individuals are now employed by the Department of Health, nor are they currently employed as pathologists in Tasmania.

The investigation has also identified that a further four people were likely involved in the practice, but no records of the names of those individuals have been able to be identified due to the inadequacy of record-keeping at the time. This work does not alter or extend the coroner's findings, but reflects our commitment to due diligence, transparency and informed accountability in responding to this matter.

I can also assure the parliament and the community that contemporary legal, clinical and governance frameworks, including strengthened consent requirements, oversight arrangements and professional standards are now in place to prevent those practises from occurring in the future. Specifically, the *Coroners Act 1995* has strengthened the requirements for coroner authorisation and the creation of a statutory role of state forensic pathologist has ensured that no human remains can be removed or used without consent. The Tasmanian Law Reform Institute is currently reviewing Tasmania's coronial act, with the aim of further strengthening the operation of the coronial system and ensuring it is responsive to the needs of those affected

by it. I can confirm that families will have the opportunity to contribute and share their thoughts and experiences in relation to this important work through the consultation that will occur as part of the review.

Finally, we affirm the state's ongoing commitment to transparency, accountability, and ethical responsibility in all matters involving the care, custody, and dignity of human remains. These principles are fundamental to public trust, and they must guide our actions now and into the future.

To those affected, we thank you for coming forward and for asking difficult questions. Your advocacy matters. Your voices assist us to learn from past failures and do better. Your experiences have informed and will continue to inform the government's response to these historical practices. The significance of your presence here today and the strength it takes to be present as this apology is made is a powerful reminder of why this apology matters.

Once again, on behalf of the state, we are deeply sorry.

[12.02 p.m.]

Mr WILLIE (Clark - Leader of the Opposition) - Honourable Speaker, I welcome the family members and supporters who've joined us in parliament today. I'm glad that you have been able to be here with us, but I deeply wish it was under different circumstances. I also welcome those watching and listening in. This is difficult, but very important. I encourage anyone affected by today's apology or by the findings more broadly to make use of the support services available through the department. I appreciate this is incredibly troubling and a very difficult time for many people.

Today, this parliament is considering a motion that acknowledges one of the most profound failures of public institutions in our state's history, a failure that resulted in human organs and tissue samples being unlawfully stolen after coronial autopsies between 1966 and 1991: a failure that caused immense grief and trauma for families across Tasmania and a failure that fundamentally breached the trust people place in public institutions at some of the most vulnerable moments of their lives.

I rise today to offer my sincerest condolences to every family member affected by these practises. I acknowledge the strong advocacy of the 21 directly affected family members and their supporters whose persistence has helped bring us to this moment, along with the many other families affected by this injustice. For many years, families sought answers. Many fought simply to have the seriousness of the matter recognised, and many carried an enormous emotional burden while doing so.

I want to express my sincere sympathy for the grief and trauma experienced by these families and the many others affected by this failure. I acknowledge the unimaginable pain these distressing historical practices have caused and the profound shock of learning that the remains of loved ones were stolen without knowledge or consent. This harm has deeply affected individual families and has been felt across our wider community. In recent months I've been contacted directly by family members seeking support on this matter. I want you to know that we are listening to you. We see you and we care deeply about the injustice that has been done to your loved ones and your families.

The motion before the house today matters because it does more than simply acknowledge what happened; it acknowledges that public institutions failed Tasmanian families and profoundly breached the trust placed in them. Importantly, it accepts shared responsibility for the fact that these practices were not prevented, identified or stopped for decades. That is significant because institutional failures of this scale do not belong to one government, one minister or one individual alone. They occur across systems, cultures and administrations and time, and while the individuals involved may change, the responsibility of the state to acknowledge harm does not. Accepting shared responsibility is important because it recognises the institutional failures are not resolved simply by identifying one individual or one moment in time.

Systems either detect and prevent wrongdoing, or they fail to do so. In this case, those systems failed for far too long.

Tasmania has, at different times in its history, had to confront painful truths about the conduct of institutions and the treatment of vulnerable people. Those moments are never easy but a mature society does not avoid difficult truths because they are uncomfortable. It confronts them honestly, acknowledges harm and works to rebuild trust.

That is why this apology matters. Public apologies cannot undo harm. They cannot erase grief. They cannot return lost trust overnight. But institutions have an obligation to acknowledge truth honestly when they fail people.

Silence compounds trauma. Avoidance compounds trauma and families deserve to hear clearly from this parliament that what happened to their loved ones was wrong.

From 1966 to 1991, human organs and tissue samples from members of our community were stolen and retained. The people at the centre of this were deeply loved children, siblings, parents, partners and friends. They were people whose families trusted that they would be treated with dignity and respect while in the care of our institutions.

That trust was broken and that theft has devastated individual families and shaken trust across the Tasmanian community. I believe it's important that we reflect carefully on what that means.

I believe the persistence shown by the families throughout this process reflects something deeply human. The determination to ensure that people they love were recognised not as records within a system, but as human beings where dignity matters.

Families encountering coronial systems are often experiencing some of the worst moments of their lives, grieving, traumatised and vulnerable, and they place enormous trust in doctors, pathologists, hospitals, coroners, and the state itself. Most people navigating those systems are not in a position to question processes or challenge institutional authority, nor should they have to be. That is precisely why public institutions carry such a profound ethical responsibility because people entrust them with care at moments when they are least able to protect themselves.

In this case, those institutions failed that responsibility, and for the many families, the trauma did not end there. For many people, the first indication that something had happened came through media reporting or letters from the coroner. Families who believed their loved

ones had been laid to rest properly were suddenly confronted with the unimaginable reality that some of their loved ones' remains have been unlawfully retained.

Many families have spoken about feeling forced to grieve for their loved ones all over again; to effectively hold a funeral for them for a second time. That re-traumatisation matters, and it's important that this parliament acknowledges not only the original practices themselves, but also the distress caused by the way these matters were disclosed, investigated, communicated and acted upon. That is reflected appropriately in the motion before the House.

I also believe there is another difficult truth we need to acknowledge. The coroner observed that these practices continued for a very long time and ended only comparatively recently. That should give all of us pause because it reminds us that harmful institutional cultures can persist quietly for decades if they are not scrutinised properly.

Practices can become normalised within systems even when they should have never been accepted; and institutions can lose sight of the humanity of people at the centre of their processes.

That is why transparency matters. It's why accountability matters. It is why ethical oversight must never be treated as a secondary institutional convenience or entrenched practices. That lesson extends beyond this specific case. Medical education and research play an essential role improving lives and strengthening healthcare, but scientific or educational value can never override dignity, consent and humanity.

People cannot become disconnected from their humanity simply because they are within a system, a process, a laboratory or an institution. The people at the centre of this were human beings, they were loved, and they deserved better than what happened to them.

I want to recognise the efforts of all my parliamentary colleagues from this House and the other place, who have worked directly with affected families and continued to raise this matter. I also want to acknowledge that the government has made significant efforts to today's approach and apologise sensitively.

Families have been consulted, support services have been put in place and there is clearly been an effort to ensure today is approached with care. That matters because apologies like this cannot simply be procedural. They need to recognise the humanity of the people at the centre of the harm.

Whilst we know that a central instigator of this abhorrent practice is the deceased forensic pathologist Dr Royal Cummings, and he cannot be held to account personally for his wrongdoing, we support the ongoing efforts of the Department of Health, Tasmania Police and the Director of Public Prosecutions, to investigate this matter further and take action where that is still possible.

Families deserve transparency and they deserve confidence that every effort has been made to fully understand what has occurred. Significant changes have occurred since these practices took place, including legislative reform through the *Coroners Act 1995* and strengthened oversight arrangements. There are now rigorous processes in place through the state forensic pathologists and broader safeguards to ensure this can never happen again. That is important.

So too is maintaining public trust in our institutions because families must always be able to trust that their loved ones will be treated with dignity, care and respect. Tasmania is a small state. Our institutions are close to our communities. People often know one another personally. Trust matters deeply here. That makes failures like this particularly painful, because these institutions are not distant bureaucracies, they are part of the fabric of community life. That is why rebuilding trust matters.

To every family affected by this, again, I offer my sincerest condolences. Your loved ones matter, your grief matters, and your advocacy has ensured that this painful truth has finally been acknowledged publicly. Today cannot undo the harm that was done, but it can acknowledge it. It can reaffirm the simple principle that every person deserves dignity and respect in life and in death.

For everyone entrusted with public responsibility, today should be a reminder that institutions must earn and protect the trust of the community. In this case, public institutions failed families at some of the most vulnerable moments of their lives. We cannot change what happened. We have a responsibility to acknowledge that the failure has happened, to learn from it and to ensure that public institutions entrusted to us always treat people with dignity, humanity, transparency and care. I join with minister Archer and my parliamentary colleagues in supporting the motion before the House.

Members - Hear, hear.

[12.14 p.m.]

Dr WOODRUFF (Franklin - Leader of the Greens) - Honourable Speaker, I acknowledge the families and friends of the people we are speaking about today who are joining us in the House for this apology, and I recognise the deep pain you may be feeling and the strength it has taken for you to be here with us today.

I rise on behalf of the Tasmanian Greens to add our voice of apology for the grotesque crimes of successive state institutions and individual employees. It is a fact that for 25 years, medical professionals, state institutions, conducted procedures and hid the theft of human remains of 177 people's bodies. Between 1966 and 1991, families went to the funerals of people they loved whose bodies had already suffered the indignity of an autopsy, believing that these people would finally rest in peace. This was the reality for 177 families. What they subsequently found out, to people's shock and distress, was that over a 25-year period, pathologists working in state institutions had taken parts of the bodies of the person they loved without approval and even without the knowledge of next of kin. The immense pain and suffering that this caused grieving families cannot be fully described by someone who hasn't lived that experience, but we know from the stories that people here today and others have shared that this is a grief that has multiple dimensions and continues to be lived by people every day today.

These institutions stored parts of the loved ones of families in bottles and jars on display for people to view at a cabinet at the University of Tasmania's RA Rodda Museum of Pathology in Hobart. They were props and specimens. This is not a failure of administrative processes. It was a systematic desecration of human dignity under the guise of law and medical science. It was an outrage against the living and against those who'd passed away.

The coronial report from last year forced this truth into the light and for decades, families had visited the graves of their families and friends, children, brothers, sisters, parents - grieving families entirely unaware that a part of the person that they loved, who they were taking the time to visit and remember, was sitting on a shelf in central Hobart. It's hard to imagine, then, the visceral shock of families when they came to understand what had happened. We know and we hear that that trauma goes on today.

In preparing for today, I read a lot of personal stories, just like other members in the Chamber have done. John Santi's experience, whose brother died in a motorcycle accident, is very hard to forget and he shared with the media, with Tasmanians, the fact that:

We buried him 50 years ago, only to find out 50 years later that these people had stolen his brain. I went to my brother's grave site every second week and then to realise he wasn't even all there. When I met the funeral people at the cemetery to rebury that piece of his brain, they passed it to me in a shoe box. I opened up the shoe box, and it was his whole brain. To have to rebury a loved one twice in 50 years is inconceivable.

John's is one of many stories. We also hear of people who are attending graves of children who weren't all there for many years. Today's apology is not about abstract historical practices or the failures of laws and policies. We are making this apology to families today because state-employed pathologists systematically, deliberately, and unlawfully stole specimens from the bodies of deceased Tasmanians. They removed organs and took tissue samples. They did this behind closed doors using the absolute cover of coronial autopsies. Then they handed those stolen remains over to the Rodda Museum.

In coroner Simon Cooper's words:

It appears pathologists may have actively sourced specimens from autopsies to give to the museum, as well as taking body parts that had been held for forensic purposes under the *Coroner's Act*.

Under the laws that applied at the time, and under current laws, body parts sourced or retained or stolen as part of investigations into the cause of death cannot be used for medical research or education without the knowledge or consent of relevant family members. Not only were the actions of those pathologists and others deeply offensive and deeply harmful to families, let's be clear, they were also illegal. I want to recognise that the minister has been very consultative and respectful in coming to the wording of this motion, and she's made herself and her department open to MPs for feedback. I take her at her word that she's also had that level of openness, inclusion and engagement with family members and the people here today.

The Greens offered various suggestions for making this motion more trauma-informed, which have been adopted. I thank you, minister. I have some additional observations in passing, and it goes to something that the Leader of the Opposition just said about the culture in institutions, which is hard to see until you unpack things.

It's important that we don't inadvertently absolve the responsibility of state institutions and individuals for the terrible actions they took. Yes, human organs and tissue samples were 'stolen and held at the Rodda Museum', but they did not steal themselves. Forensic pathologists employed by the Department of Health actively took them. And yes, actions 'represented

a serious failure', but it was not the failure of a mechanism or a system; it was a betrayal by human beings who held public authority. On the failures of laws and policies - laws and policies do not enact themselves. Successive governments, health administrators and institutional leaders explicitly chose to look the other way for 25 years.

It's also a fact that for nearly three decades, families across this state buried children, parents and partners believing in their deepest moments of grief that they were laying them down to rest whole. Instead, state institutions treated their loved one as property and curated their body parts into an institutional collection.

Today is a wholehearted apology for that, without caveat. I make this apology and I say I'm deeply sorry for what happened on behalf of the Greens. This motion apologises for the enduring distress, anger, pain, grief and trauma that families have experienced. I also need to mention and explicitly name the horror of how these families found out and the additional trauma that that caused. When, in January last year, Tasmanians opened their local newspaper to find a public court notice that listed 177 names of people deceased, I can't imagine the visual shock that that would have caused, decades after a tragic loss, to find that the state had secretly harvested your child or your parent and held their remains in a museum. When that news was revealed in papers around Tasmania, state institutions inflicted a secondary trauma onto affected families decades after the initial grief.

The state did not just commit an historic crime - the state, unfortunately and terribly, bungled the disclosure and re-traumatised these families all over again. For the last 15 months, family members have fought through institutional walls to get basic answers. That is not an historical practice; it has been a contemporary failure of care and accountability.

Today we are affirming our commitment to transparency, accountability and ethical safeguards, and I believe I can say for all members, that we expect that for that commitment to be genuine, it must be backed with concrete actions. A formal apology does not wipe the slate clean, and I acknowledge and accept the commitments that the minister has made in her apology and other statements she has made. We will certainly be working with the minister, with the government, to make sure that the action she has committed to will come to bear.

The Attorney-General does need to ensure that Tasmania Police and the Director of Public Prosecutions thoroughly investigate every breach of the law that occurred and hold any surviving responsible individuals or culpable institutions legally accountable.

We also urge the government to look to properly resourcing the Coroner's office to make sure they have the capacity to enact compassionate changes - be it processes or the training that's needed for trauma-informed communication with families.

It's our responsibility as parliamentarians to ensure that the government doesn't take this moment in this place to apologise and not take the steps. I don't imply that that would be the case, but we are committed to working with the government to make sure that doesn't happen.

I also want to recognise - and she's just left the Chamber - a part of the reason we're here today is because of the advocacy on behalf of families of the honourable Meg Webb MLC, the member for Nelson, and in the House the member for Braddon, Mr Craig Garland. To the families sitting in the Gallery and watching from home, the Greens acknowledge your pain, we acknowledge your anger and your hurt, and we acknowledge the absolute rightness of your

disgust. We acknowledge that these are not feelings that can just go away with an apology. Only time helps to heal grief, if it does, and I'm sure it's even more the case with the grief and loss born twice over. On behalf of the Greens, as a member of this parliament, and following Greens before me, we are sorry.

In conclusion, I want to reflect the words of health ethics and professionalism expert Dr Dominique Martin. She said:

I suspect we're not done with finding out things that have happened in the recent past that we nowadays would be quite concerned about. What matters is that [patients and families] have a choice in it, that they have control over that, and usually they have some knowledge of how things will be treated. I think it matters particularly from an ethical perspective, because it speaks to how we think about and treat living people.

I conclude with my deepest apology and commend this motion to the House.

Members - Hear, hear.

[12.27 p.m.]

Mr ROCKLIFF (Braddon - Premier) - Honourable Speaker, I rise in support of this motion and in support of all Tasmanians, all Tasmanian families who were wronged by these historical practices in our state. Just as this parliament has formally apologised to victims of child sexual abuse in government institutions and to women who are victims of past forced adoption practices, it is our duty as members of parliament to speak out when we learn of troubling and historical wrongs and of very clear failures. I want to thank members who have spoken today, for minister Mrs Archer, and everyone's words - delivered with empathy, kindness, but most importantly, very, very strong justification.

Today, we acknowledge the deep hurt of individuals and families who had their loved ones' remains stolen - stolen from them and stolen from you. That is why this apology is so needed and so important. Stolen and kept at a museum without their consent, without their knowledge, and without your knowledge. The trauma for families continues today. I feel that hurt and that anger. I felt it in the corridor. Hurt and anger of which you deserve, and quite rightly deserve to feel.

As the members said, they weren't specimens. They were family members - mums, dads, sons, daughters, brothers and sisters. People who were loved, and people whose grief has been made worse by what has occurred. I am deeply sorry that this has happened. I'm sorry for your loss, and I'm sorry for the prolonged pain that this has caused you and continues to cause you every single day.

These practices were wrong. No practice, as has been said, can be justified in the name of science. Respect for loved ones in death is fundamental to our society. It's what sets humans apart and it is deeply rooted in many cultures and religions. There was no respect given to those who had parts of their body stolen. There was no dignity in the treatment of their bodies or the treatment of their families. The practices at the Rodda Museum were abhorrent in practice and in law, and very clearly devoid of empathy. Rights were ignored, trust was breached and a lack of governance and oversight failed to prevent it. While there have been changes to legal,

clinical and to governance to prevent it happening again, that does not make it any easier for the families that are here today or watching online.

As the minister said, we hear your grief, your anger, your shock that this has happened. We feel your hurt and we understand this has caused renewed stress and has broken your trust. We recognise your need for answers and for accountability, and that was made very, very clear to me from the people that I spoke to today.

No apology can undo what has happened, but we can prevent it happening again to any other person or family. While the period of this atrocity sadly continued over many, many years, it is beholden on our government, this parliament, of the day to apologise on behalf of those past governments. As the Premier of the Tasmanian Government today, I offer our unreserved apology to all Tasmanians who were hurt, still hurting and impacted by the taking of human organs and tissue samples by forensic and hospital pathologists employed in the Department of Health and provided to the Rodda Museum.

I offer our unreserved apology for failing to treat your loved one with the dignity and respect that they deserved and you deserved. I am so very sorry this happened to you and your families, and I'm so very sorry that our systems let you down so appallingly and have compounded your grief and your distress to this day.

I want to thank you, families and loved ones, for coming forward, for being here today, and I acknowledge those that, for their own reasons, are unable to be here today. You have helped us all to learn from past mistakes and to do much, much better, and to not only ensure that this must never happen again, but also to act from this point on with very clear action to ensure your need for answers - and there are still answers that you deserve - but also for accountability that you also deserve on behalf of your loved ones.

Again, on behalf of the state of Tasmania, we are deeply, deeply sorry.

Members - Hear, hear.

[12.34 p.m.]

Prof RAZAY (Bass) - Honourable Speaker, I rise to support the government's motion and acknowledge all the families and friends in attendance today. Families place enormous trust in medical professionals and institutions during the most vulnerable moments of their life - at times, the worst day of their lives. That trust is based on transparency, respect and compassion.

In this case, families were betrayed. Every person deserves dignity in death and every family deserves the right to make informed decisions about the remains of their loved ones. Treating a person's body with care, compassion and honour after death recognises their humanity and acknowledges the value of the lives they lived. It also provides comfort and reassurance to grieving families.

This dark chapter in our state history is a clear violation of the ethical principles that underpin the medical profession, including the values expressed in the Hippocratic Oath. As a doctor, I find it particularly shocking that this most awful breach of trust took place in our recent past. This simply should never have happened.

Today's apology is an acknowledgement of the deeply distressing failure in ethical and professional responsibility, but that doesn't change the fact that this breach of trust has caused profound emotional pain. The investigation and intense media attention has forced families and friends to relive the day they lost their loved one. Each new detail, headline and public discussion serves as a painful reminder of their grief, their heartbreak. These families deserve support and care. This apology from the honourable Health minister cannot undo the harm caused but it's welcome and a necessary first step toward taking accountability.

To the families today, I deeply feel the pain and suffering that you have endured over the years and I am deeply sorry.

Members - Hear, hear.

[12.38 p.m.]

Ms BURNET (Clark) - Honourable Speaker, the minister's words today, this motion, the contributions so far and what we will come to hear are an important recognition of the wrongs associated with the RA Rodda Museum collection.

Fundamental to any institution, be it government or university, is the responsibility to uphold dignity. In circumstances where individuals' remains were taken and retained without consent and the wishes of families ignored, that responsibility was profoundly breached. In this case, the dignity of human life and the respectful handling of the body after death was violated. The collection, retention and display of human remains without due consent represents a serious ethical failure. As a former health practitioner, I'm deeply dismayed by this breach of trust. It stands in stark contrast to the ethical standards that underpin healthcare and it is both shocking and profoundly disappointing of a learning institution such as the University of Tasmania.

I acknowledge the families present in the Gallery today and others who are not here or who could not make the journey today, who have been directly impacted by these actions. government institutions, universities and individuals failed in their duty to your loved ones and to you. I recognise that you have felt and still feel disrespected, dismissed and unheard, not only because of the indignities inflicted on your deceased family members, but also through aspects of the more recent coronial project processes.

Last year I was contacted by a family member and I want to acknowledge that conversation. He shared the deeply distressing experience of learning, years later and in an unforgivably callous way, that parts of his relatives body had been taken after death without consent. The impact of that discovery has been enduring. While I cannot imagine to speak on behalf of affected families, I sincerely hope that today's acknowledgement through Minister Archer's apology on behalf of the government and the parliament represents a meaningful step towards healing.

I also acknowledge the persistent and important work of Meg Webb MLC, whose efforts ensured that this apology was not allowed to fall off the agenda. I commend, too, the care taken by minister Archer and the Department of Health staff in bringing us to this point. As a crossbench member, I see it as my duty to work proactively to ensure that atrocities associated with the RA Rodda Museum are never repeated. It is not simply a matter of whether laws existed or now exist to prohibit such conduct, although they certainly do now.

The deeper issue we must confront is the culture of silence that allowed those in positions of power to act without accountability, that is the challenge before us. In that context, I acknowledge the museum curator in 2016 who raised concerns and effectively blew the whistle on these practices. If we are serious about preventing such failures in the future, we must ensure robust whistleblower protections, and that is something within the power of this parliament to deliver.

What remains deeply concerning for the families and for all of us is that it took a decade from those initial concerns being raised by the museum curator to this apology today. That delay speaks to a broader culture of silence and an aversion to transparency that must be addressed. I urge the government to remain open to considering appropriate redress schemes and to act on the lessons learned, not only from these historical events but also from the more recent coronial project responses.

This is a sombre day, but an important one. It is a day on which the government and the parliament formally acknowledge past wrongs. It is important not only to speak these words but to bear witness to this apology, an expression of respect that was not afforded to the deceased who were the subject of these outrages. These are difficult but necessary steps toward healing. We must continue to confront the wrongs of the past, wrongful then as they are now.

I hope this moment contributes to recognition of the deep and ongoing trauma experienced by families and loved ones. Most importantly, this must never happen again. From this egregious experience, we must learn and ensure that injustices are never repeated.

Members - Hear, hear.

[12.44 p.m.]

Ms FINLAY (Bass - Deputy Leader of the Opposition) - Honourable Speaker, today carries a weight that all of us in this place must reflect on. To the families, to your friends and supporters who are here today, I want to acknowledge the strength that it takes to be present for this moment and I want to say really simply and really clearly, I'm deeply sorry: Sorry that, at your time of loss, when care and dignity should have been everything, trust was placed in institutions and that trust was not honoured.

Sorry that the impact of those failures was not confined to the past, but has continued in different ways over time. Your loved ones were not treated with the dignity they deserved. Something so deeply personal in loss, something so deeply connected to love and to memory, was handled in a way that no one should ever experience.

In acknowledging that, I also want to recognise that for many of you, it was not a single moment and it's been experienced again over time. When you learned what had happened in the way that you were told and in how you have had to live with it. Not only then but in the way the institutions responded, in the way that you didn't feel heard and in the way that you felt disrespected in the process that followed.

Today, this apology really matters because for all of us telling the truth plainly and without qualification matters and because it reflects a willingness of this parliament and this place to listen and to learn and take responsibility for something that was never okay.

It also requires much more than our words today, much more than an apology, and we owe you the confidence that the way human remains are treated now is governed by clear, ethical and transparent safeguards and that consent is properly understood and respected, that as families, you are communicated openly and with genuine care and when issues arise, that they are dealt with early and not left unresolved.

Trust can't be assumed, it has to be built and rebuilt through actions as much as words. So to the families today, I can't even begin to expect that anything said in this place will take away your pain that you've carried for so long, but I hope that you see and feel today that this parliament, that together we're prepared to face this honestly and to say without hesitation that you deserved better, that your loved ones deserved better, and that really matters.

I support the motion and thank the minister for her work and offer you my deepest apology.

[12.48 p.m.]

Mr BARNETT (Lyons - Deputy Premier) - Honourable Speaker, I acknowledge and thank those families and individuals here in the parliament today for this willingness to be here to listen and for those online and elsewhere listening.

I rise to concur and associate my remarks with those that have been shared already in strong support for the motion before us provided by the honourable Bridget Archer, Minister for Health, Mental Health and Wellbeing and to formally and unreservedly apologise to the individuals and families affected by these abhorrent and completely unacceptable historic practices.

For those families, many of whom are here today, and many more who carry this experience privately, I acknowledge the profound hurt, the shock and the distress that has been caused. As is now known, between 1966 and 1991, samples of human remains were removed during post mortem examinations and stolen for the Rodda Museum.

These actions were taken without the knowledge or consent of the families. This should never have happened. What occurred was not simply a failure of process, it was a failure of care. It's a failure of respect, a failure to honour and a failure of dignity to provide dignity to those who had died and the rights of those who loved them. It was also profound breach of the trust that families place in public institutions at moments of grief and vulnerability. For many families, these actions disrupted mourning, challenged deeply held cultural, spiritual, and personal beliefs and altered the way they understood the loss of their loved one. At the centre of this matter are the actions of pathologists, who stole human remains and removed and retained specimens without consent, and the systems that allowed this to occur and continue over many years.

While these practices were historical, their impact is not confined to the past. For many families, the discovery, often decades later, that parts of their loved one had been taken without their knowledge or consent has reopened grief, disrupted mourning, and caused deep and lasting trauma. Some families have described feelings of shock and disbelief. Others have spoken of anger, betrayal, and a loss of trust in institutions that were meant to protect them. We recognise that for some families, questions remain unanswered and that uncertainty itself has been part of the harm.

We also acknowledge that this harm did not occur in isolation. It was enabled by systems of governance, oversight, and professional practice that failed to prevent, question, or stop these actions. We also recognise that this matter raises broader questions about oversight, accountability, and the obligations of public institutions to act transparently, particularly when exercising powers at times of profound vulnerability for families. Since that time, significant changes have been made to legal, clinical, and ethical frameworks. Consent requirements have been strengthened, oversight has improved, and standards have evolved.

We also acknowledge that a number of affected families have raised concerns about the coronial process which brought the events to light. Families have spoken about the emotional burden of navigating complex legal and institutional processes while continuing to carry profound grief and trauma. Many have expressed concerns about communication and the extent to which they felt heard throughout the process. It is important to recognise these experiences respectfully. As a parliament, we acknowledge the independent role of the coroner and the importance of the coronial jurisdiction in investigating deaths and matters of public concern in accordance with the law.

However, acknowledging the independence of the coronial process does not prevent us from reflecting on whether the broader legislative framework, practices, and procedures surrounding that process adequately meet the needs and expectations of families engaging with it at times of immense vulnerability. That is why I instructed the Tasmanian Law Reform Institute to review the *Coroners Act 1995* and the Coroner's Rules 2016 with a particular focus on any desirable changes to the jurisdiction, powers, practices, or procedures of the Coronial Division to better support those who interact with it, as well as the broader community, and how information and support can be improved for families, friends, and others connected to a deceased person who is the subject of a coronial inquiry, including in relation to autopsies, cultural and spiritual beliefs and practices, and access to counselling services.

I'm pleased to note that the Tasmanian Law Reform Institute last week released a discussion paper as part of this review. This process provides an important opportunity to ensure that the lessons from the Rodda Museum matter are fully absorbed into future coronial practice. While respecting the independence of the coroner, the review focuses on improving the legislative framework under which they operate and the practical processes of the Coronial Division going forward. Importantly, the discussion paper provides a clear pathway for affected families and indeed the broader community to share their experiences and insights, and to form an important part of the Tasmanian Law Reform Institute's work to inform future reforms.

In respect to everything that's been said today, I want to put on the record my sincere thanks to the honourable Bridget Archer, Minister for Health, Mental Health and Wellbeing, for her leadership, for her diligence and her care. I want to acknowledge and thank the Premier, Jeremy Rockliff, for his support. I want to acknowledge all members in this place and in the other place. I especially acknowledge the work, the research, the collaboration with government of the honourable Meg Webb MLC.

To the families, in conclusion, thank you for your courage in coming forward. Thank you for sharing your experiences, often at great personal cost. Your persistence has ensured that these events were not left unspoken or ignored. Your voices continue to shape the way Tasmania reflects on this history and learns from it. Your voices have ensured that this history is acknowledged and that it is not repeated.

On behalf of the parliament and the state of Tasmania, I strongly support the motion. I offer personally this apology to you sincerely, unreservedly and with deep respect. We are sorry.

Members - Hear, hear.

[12.57 p.m.]

Ms DOW (Braddon) - Honourable Speaker, my fellow honourable members of parliament and most importantly, the families and supporters who are here with us in the Gallery in their parliament today. I acknowledge that it must be incredibly difficult for you to be here today, but I want to thank you for being here. Some of you have travelled long distances to be here and I want to thank you for your tenacity and your strong advocacy on behalf of those you love.

Today we come together with heavy hearts as a parliament and with a solemn duty. I acknowledge for those with us today and those watching from afar that today's discussions may be difficult for you, and I encourage you to access the supports that have been made available through the department.

This motion before this House is for the families who are here with us today and those who cannot be here. Those who have carried grief, confusion and anger for a number of years, and for the memory of those Tasmanians whose organs and tissues were stolen, retained and unlawfully displayed in the Rodda Pathology Museum at the University of Tasmania without any formal consent or knowledge. These Tasmanians were deeply loved. They were your children, siblings, parents, partners and friends. It is still difficult to comprehend that this unethical and appalling practice occurred between the 1950s and the early 1990s, which is not that long ago. This reflects a dark time in Tasmania's history. I find myself once again in this place saying that as a state we must do better.

For many of you with us today, learning of this injustice and violation of your human rights and the human rights of your loved ones was a reopening of grief. It was a second loss. It was a betrayal of trust by public institutions that should have protected you and your loved ones, and respected you and your families. We acknowledge the shock, the hurt that many of you have described. We acknowledge the anger, the confusion, and the dark shadow that this has cast over your lives.

To the families who are here with us today, your presence is an act of courage. You have come to demand truth, to seek recognition and to hold public institutions to account. We see you, we hear you, and we are profoundly sorry. I wanted to acknowledge for many of these Tasmanians and their families that their death was traumatic. As we know, families and loved ones -

Sitting suspended from 1 p.m. to 2.30 p.m.

FORMAL APOLOGY

RA Rodda Museum of Pathology

Resumed from above.

Ms DOW - As we know, families and loved ones involved in coronial investigations endure enough, let alone having to deal with this breach of human dignity, rights and trust in public institutions years later.

I want to acknowledge one of my constituents who's here with us today. When I was first made aware of what happened at the Rodda Museum, I was incredibly shocked and found it very difficult to understand how this could have happened. But it wasn't until my constituent came to see me in my office to tell me about his experience and the traumatic death of his loved one that I began to understand the extent of the pain and suffering on families and loved ones. This is indeed an issue of humanity. For my constituent, the communications they received notifying them of what had happened to their loved one's remains were woefully inadequate. This continues to be a distressing time for my constituent and for many others, and there is a need for ongoing support across our communities for all those who've been affected. I ask that the minister take that into consideration today. What happened was wrong. It was a breach of ethical standards, a failure of legal and public institutional safeguards and a failure of the state to protect the dignity and rights of all Tasmanians.

On behalf of this parliament, we accept responsibility for these failures. We acknowledge that the systems and institutions that should have upheld the highest standards of care and respect did not do so. We are sorry that your loved ones were treated in ways that denied their dignity. We are sorry that you were not told the truth, and we are sorry that you were forced to relive your loss in such a painful and public way.

An apology must be accompanied by action. Words alone cannot heal what was taken, but they must be the beginning of meaningful change. Part 5 of this motion before the parliament today affirms the need for the Tasmanian government to continue to be transparent, accountable and ethically responsible in all matters involving the care, custody and dignity of human remains, with robust legal, clinical and governance safeguards in place to prevent any reoccurrence of such practices. I look forward to the government outlining further how they intend to achieve this.

Human dignity and human rights are enduring in life and death, and if we are to restore faith and trust in our public institutions, this must be our foundation from which to begin. I commend this important motion to the parliament.

Members - Hear, hear.

[2.33 p.m.]

Mr GARLAND (Braddon) - Honourable Speaker, I'd like to thank all of you up in the gallery for coming along today. I know how difficult it is and I understand the grief and the trauma that you have been through. It's been ongoing and hopefully this will in some way bring some form of closure to you today.

I would also like to mention Meg Webb for a continued advocacy. Stephen Karpeles, my previous adviser, he's been strong on this and right there right through it. I'd also like to thank the other members here who've made a contribution today and minister Archer for bringing this important motion on.

What has happened? I think it can be summed up as a heinous crime. To have family members' body parts stolen and done whatever with without the consent of the family members, without them knowing, it's absolutely abhorrent. If we can do one thing, and that is make sure this never happens again, that will be a positive. The fact that it's taken so long to have these people here is a blight on this parliament. Sincerely and heartfelt - I cannot comprehend what it must have been like to have this been relived day after day in the media and then finally here. Hopefully this in some way will bring some form of closure.

It was a violation, a violation of those people that had no say over what happened to them and it's been a big kick in the guts for everybody that's been involved with that, even people that are advocating on behalf of the deceased and the family members concerned. I don't know really what else to say other than let's not let it happen again. This is the first step in acknowledging and making things easier for those people affected by this. Thank you all for who have contributed and, once again, thank you for coming along. I know how difficult this must have been to do this. So, thank you, honourable Speaker.

Members - Hear, hear.

[2.35 p.m.]

Mrs ARCHER (Bass - Minister for Health, Mental Health and Wellbeing) - Honourable Speaker, I want to begin by thanking everybody who has spoken here today for their important contributions and also thank all of the families for sharing their individual stories and experiences and for engaging throughout this apology in whatever way has felt right for you. I want to again acknowledge how painful this would have been and continues to be and also reiterate, as other members have said in their contributions, support is available both here in the parliament today and also when you leave here.

In summing up, I again want to acknowledge on behalf of the Tasmanian parliament that between 1966 and 1991, human organs and remains obtained following coronial autopsies were stolen and held in connection with the Rodda Museum of Pathology at the University of Tasmania without the knowledge or consent of senior next of kin or family members. No scientific, educational or institutional purpose can justify this. As members have reflected, the findings of the coroner clearly established that these practices represented a serious failure to respect the dignity of the deceased and the rights of their families, a failure to obtain consent and a breach of trust placed in public institutions by the community.

We also recognise that these matters were not investigated or addressed in a timely or trauma-informed way. As I said earlier - and this is the most important point - these were not just body parts or specimens or human remains. They were mothers, fathers, daughters, sons, brothers and sisters. They were people, your people, and I again say to everyone affected by these horrific practices, we're sorry.

The SPEAKER - Thank you, minister, and as well as the supports that are here in parliament today to everyone who is watching online, there are a range of free supports available for you as well that includes Access Mental Health, Lifeline and Beyond Blue.

Motion agreed to, *nemine contradicente*.

The SPEAKER - We now move on to orders of the day and so, to everyone in the Gallery, that is the conclusion of the apology and we thank you for being here for all this time. Thank you.