

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 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.

PARLIAMENT OF TASMANIA
LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL
HANSARD

Tuesday 19 May 2026

The President, **Mr Farrell**, took the Chair at 11 a.m., acknowledged the Traditional People and read Prayers.

[Excerpt]

MOTION

Formal Apology - RA Rodda Museum of Pathology

Ms WEBB (Nelson) - Mr President, I move motion No. 15 standing in my name, but before I do that I acknowledge the deep pain and fear that this matter has stirred within our communities across Australia, including Tasmania. I recognise that many in our community may be carrying strong feelings as a result of this tragedy and today's discussion may impact people sitting here in the House or those watching online.

I strongly encourage anyone feeling overwhelmed, anxious or isolated to reach out as support has been arranged to be on hand today. For members of the public, there's also a range of free supports available to the community including Access Mental Health, a mental health support, triage and referral phoneline delivered by the Department of Health Tasmania. It operates 24 hours a day, 7 days a week to support the Tasmanian community and make it easier to access the Tasmanian mental health system. Anyone in Tasmania can call Access Mental Health on 1800 332 388 for counselling and support over the phone. Other supports include Lifeline on 13 11 14 or Beyond Blue on 1300 224 636.

Mr President, I move -

(1) The Legislative Council:

- (a) notes the unacceptable and unlawful practices which occurred between 1966 and 1991 which saw 177 specimens of human remains stolen from coronial autopsies and sent to the R.A Rodda Museum of Pathology, without consent of the individuals or families involved, and in contravention of the *Coroners Act 1957*, as reported upon by Coroner Simon Cooper in the Coronial Project - Museum Cases Finding Report, 8 September 2025;
- (b) Acknowledges the hurt and trauma endured by current family members upon the discovery their loved ones were subjected to these unacceptable and unlawful practices, and also acknowledges the additional hurt caused for many by the manner in which they discovered remains of their loved one had been taken, and in some instances, displayed, without their

knowledge or consent; and

- (2) The Legislative Council notes the formal apology to those individuals and family members affected by these practices, to be delivered by the Minister for Health on Tuesday 19 May on behalf of the State.

It may be useful to briefly frame this debate in this place in some context for new members as well as for those listening. Formal apologies delivered on behalf of the government of the day are usually delivered in the parliamentary Chamber of government, the House of Assembly, or the Chamber in which the minister delivering the apology may sit. Hence, the formal apology for the historic practices at the R.A Rodda Museum of Pathology was delivered today by the minister for Health in the House of Assembly.

Clause (2) of the motion before this Chamber, which we are addressing now, makes it clear this is not a formal apology being presented on behalf of the government, but instead, here we are noting or responding to that apology which was already given by the minister in the lower House earlier today. It is my understanding that this is an unusual occurrence in relation to this Chamber's involvement in previous formal state apologies, and hopefully one which will be seen to be positive and constructive.

Given the gravitas of the events central to the government's apology, and the fact the historic and ongoing hurt and trauma impacted so many people around the state, I strongly believe that all state MPs representing those affected Tasmanians should have the opportunity to also pay their respects, as it were, to those affected.

I wish to also state upfront my thanks and appreciation to the government for taking on board my request to enable the Legislative Council to formally contribute to this public apology process, and for working with me to find an appropriate mechanism by which that could happen. I know for some with whom my office has been interacting, the significance of both Chambers taking the time today to acknowledge formally what happened to their loved ones has been noted and has been deeply welcomed.

At the outset, I wish to reassure those listening that although I may be reading a prepared speech, it is written and delivered from the heart today. There is much to cover, and I do not want to risk forgetting something that someone has specifically asked me to mention here today in my contribution. As stated, members of this place heard the minister this morning deliver the government's formal apology, which outlined some of the factual developments of this shameful and sorry saga. However, for the sake of completeness and for the sake of many people listening either here in person or online, I will also be placing on the record as complete a story as possible.

This is a disturbing story consisting of multiple chapters, and when thinking that the logical place to begin telling this story is, in fact, the beginning, I found myself asking: whose beginning? The beginning as seen by the perpetrators of these acknowledged unlawful, unacceptable acts? No. They have done enough, more than enough. Instead, I am going to start at the beginning from the perspective of those affected by these horrific, abhorrent and unlawful acts which have led us here today, some of whom were here in parliament today, some who may be watching online and some who may just not be able to face it today.

For many, this nightmare began on or shortly after 25 January 2025. On this date, a list of 126 names of people deceased, from whom the coroners office believed post-autopsy samples had been stolen and kept by the R.A Rodda Museum without consent, was published in the three state newspapers: the *Mercury*, *The Examiner* and *The Advocate*.

The list was accompanied by a brief explanatory note calling for family members to contact the coroner's office to assist with its inquiries. The impact of this sudden appearance of a list of names upon family members was brutal and devastating. Some discovered their deceased loved one on the list themselves; others were informed by other family members or friends; while some only found out months later. Many felt they were being forced to grieve the loss of their loved one a second time: the loss of their infant child, their brothers, sisters, parents and partners. I find it unfathomable to try to place myself in the shoes of someone suddenly discovering their loved one is on a list due to the fact that apparently some of their remains may have been stolen and kept in a pathology museum without consent.

Following that initial shock of the publication of 126 names, the following additional historic facts became more widely known: in February 2016, the coronial division was advised by the University of Tasmania's R.A Rodda Museum of Pathology that the museum had identified it may hold human remains which appeared to have been sourced from coronial autopsies, but without consent of either the families or the coroner at the time; this 2016 Rodda Museum notification originally indicated there were three identified bone samples with a question mark over their provenance.

Once advised in 2016 by the R.A Rodda Museum of potentially unlawful remains being kept without consent, the coroners office commenced identifying the extent of human remains kept without consent and identifying the people to whom they belonged. In 2018, the coroner ordered the removal from display of all identified human remains kept without consent in the R.A Rodda Museum.

On 3 April 2024, the Tasmanian coronial division released a brief statement announcing that since receiving the R.A Rodda Museum's advice of February 2016, the coronial division had identified human remains of 147 people which had been kept from autopsies undertaken between 1953 and 1985. The coroners office also advised a formal investigation had commenced into this situation.

The coroner's Museum Cases (Coronial Project) report was released in September 2025, nine months following the January publication of the list of names. This report confirmed the final number of human remains, consisting of organs and tissue samples kept unlawfully without consent - to be clear, in breach of all standard health ethics - had been stolen following coronial autopsies: the number was 177, with these unlawful practices being identified as occurring between 1966 and 1991. That historical synopsis of what and when was placed on the public record most recently provides a brief summary of the events referenced in clause (1)(a) of the motion before us today.

Some may say that the facts speak for themselves; but in this instance, a neat timeline of factual events barely speaks at all. Rather, it is almost clinical, sanitised, a muted outline. Instead, these factual events should shout and scream to the rafters their horror and outrage. They should grab us and shake us by the shoulders while yelling, how dare they? That would not be a rhetorical question. How dare they is, in fact, at the heart of this timeline of events and at the heart of so many stories of those affected,

which brings me to the next chapter of this story, which is reflected in clause (1)(b) of the motion currently before us.

This is not a matter that can be neatly categorised and relegated as historical. Yes, the coronial project investigation may reassure us that these unlawful practices of stealing human remains during autopsies in Tasmania ceased in 1991, but the trauma, pain and hurt is current and ongoing. That hurt does not recognise, nor is it constrained by, boundaries of time. Earlier in my contribution, I described this deplorable saga as a story containing other stories: those are the lived experiences of those family members and friends whose loved ones were subjected to these unlawful acts.

I'm privileged by some of those who have interacted with my office over the last 12 to 18 months, to provide some insight here of their lived experience and their stories. Before I do that, however, I will thank and acknowledge the staff member in my office who has been at the heart of this, interacting with many of these families over this period of time, and the exemplary work that she's done for my office and for those families across that time.

To the lived experiences: in most cases I will not be providing identifying details unless I have been provided explicit permission to do so. Instead, I wish to focus on the themes that emerged from those hours of contact and discussion over these months since 25 January 2025. Earlier in my contribution, I touched on the shock and distress expressed by many people who contacted my office in the wake of that newspaper list of names published in the classified section. This was a common theme: the unimaginable shock, sitting down to lunch and receiving a phone call from a family friend alerting them that the name of their long-deceased loved one has appeared on a public list - and such a list. The bewilderment and struggling to comprehend, 'What does this mean? Why is my parent, my sibling, my spouse, my child on this list?' For some, the revelations their loved ones' human remains may have been stolen and kept without consent during autopsies had massive cultural and religious implications. Others were immediately assailed with concern over how they would break the news to elderly parents and other family members. Repeatedly, I was told of traumatised people struggling to minimize inflicting trauma on parents, or aunts and uncles, in their 80s and 90s, when having to take them through how and why their spouse or child is on that list.

I heard people relive their original grief of losing their 19-year-old brother, their 13-year-old brother, their infant and toddler children, their teenage sister, their parents, their partners. This grief was so fresh. One constituent who contacted my office and who has given me permission to outline her brother's situation stated this:

I'm happy to provide you the consent to describe my brother's fate as that will contrast and highlight the fact he was unable to give his consent to what was done to him.

Her 14-year-old brother was killed in a car accident in July 1976 and, for some reason, someone in a position of authority decided to remove and keep some of this young boy's remains, to steal parts of him. As if the death of their 14-year-old son and brother was not bad enough, the circumstances of his accident are tragic and painful in themselves. He was what was referred to as a Wybra Hall boy. He was exposed to and suffered the horrendous abuse experienced by too many at that facility, and he and two of his mates decided to escape. It was during their escape attempt that the fatal accident occurred. What his sisters and other family members have to live with is that they had

been told, before his escape attempt, that he would be released and home by Christmas, but they were not allowed to tell him. So, for all these years, that family has been grieving over the fact their brother could still be alive if he had not been so desperate to escape the appalling institutional abuse he was enduring, and feeling responsible for the fact that he didn't know he was soon to leave that cruel institution. Now their grief is compounded by this knowledge that an additional layer of institutional callousness was inflicted upon him in death. The toll of that living nightmare, of these combined historic and recent failings inflicted upon this family is, quite frankly, unimaginable.

Another current lived experience I have permission to share is that of the sister of another young man killed in 1976. This constituent's brother was 28 years old when he was killed in a motorcycle accident. Sadly, she was five months pregnant at the time and still grieves the fact that her brother never knew his niece. She believes she has never recovered from the shock of his sudden death. She was devastated at the time and grieves still. Despite living in Tasmania, she discovered her brother was on the published list when a cousin living in Queensland contacted her and sent her the details. When she contacted my office, she was still traumatised and bewildered that she hadn't been informed as next of kin. She desperately wished to have her brother's remains returned to her so they could be buried with him in his current resting place in Bagdad. So many failings in that heartbreaking story.

The last personal story that I'll mention for now is of another family who lost their son and brother during a sudden accident when a cave collapsed. This young man's name was not on one of the published lists of 2025, but instead his 90-year-old father, a Vietnam veteran, received a letter in the mail approximately four weeks after the newspaper publication of the list of names. This elderly father was so distressed that his daughter, who contacted my office, has shouldered the burden of trying to understand what happened and why. She also had to explain to her 90-year-old father why the coroner declined their request to reclaim the stolen parts for reburial, which was part of her brother's lung. Distressingly, she only discovered the fact this apology was occurring today via a news bulletin last week as her father was of the understanding that he'd be formally notified and invited to any apology or memorial. Sadly, there was insufficient time to arrange their attendance in the circumstances.

The other constant theme evident from those few examples of the multiple layers of hurt and broken trust experienced is the toll of the historic and the current that it's taking on people here and now. While some had other family members to assist through this reopening of long-nursed wounds which would never heal in the best of circumstances, others face this fresh trauma much on their own.

Repeatedly, another theme I heard was the overwhelming sense of isolation and hopelessness. We all know that families are complex. Some felt they needed to carry the weight of these latest revelations to protect other vulnerable members of the family, while others couldn't raise it with their family members through estrangement or other personal considerations. Quite often I heard variations of 'Thank goodness my mother or father is no longer alive to see this', then the loneliness for them in working out how to deal with the news on their own from then on.

The compounding harm of historic and current pain and hurt inflicted is the next chapter of the story. It highlights a significant point that was raised in clause (1)(b) of the motion before us in this Chamber, and that is acknowledgement of the additional hurt caused for many current family members by both the manner in which they found out about these atrocious, unlawful acts and the subsequent failings of processes

experienced since then. This fresh layer of pain and frustration of recent processes and their failings has been truly awful to witness, which is why I felt any apology today must specifically acknowledge those recent failings as well as the historic unlawful, unacceptable practices, and I thank the minister for taking that request on board, as reflected in the apology given by clause (4)(b) of that formal apology delivered today in the Assembly and again highlighted in clause (1)(b) of the motion before this Chamber.

The newspaper advert of the 25 January last year is a manifestation of a range of those non-trauma-informed current processes that have been so impactful. We also need to acknowledge that for many of the affected families, they didn't even see the newspaper advert of 25 January 2025. As we've already heard, some had it brought to their attention by others, while some never saw it but were informed by letters arriving out of the blue.

The themes voiced loud and clear in this context are, 'Why wasn't I contacted privately? Why am I finding out this way?' Repeatedly, we heard that family members with the same surname still live locally, yet apparently, they couldn't be found and contacted in a more trauma-informed manner than a public advertisement in the newspaper.

I won't go into too much detail regarding how badly let down so many people feel about the manner in which they discovered their loved one had body parts stolen and kept by the Rodda Museum. The coronial project's findings report presents that steps were taken to attempt to identify living next of kin, but there remain very legitimate questions from family members who can't understand why it took so long, nor why it was apparently so difficult to locate them. I've heard of multiple instances where direct family members, particularly siblings with the same surname, live in the vicinity of the address published with their loved one's name. For example, current siblings live in the same farm address listed against the deceased's name in the coronial project advert but were not contacted directly.

Other family members are still living in a Sandy Bay address listed against their loved one's name in that same advert. This was not a one-off, sadly. It was a continual theme which I had heard and therefore expected that other members here might also have heard. Rightly or wrongly, that just compounds the sense of hurt and betrayal for people, that for some reason they and their family members were not considered worth the effort of a private, trauma-informed method of contact.

A common theme across the many stories I have heard is the gut-wrenching distress as people struggled to absorb the revelations that the funeral of their child, their brother, sister, mother, father, niece or nephew did not bury them entirely. Some, for whom it was and continues to be a significant pilgrimage to regularly visit loved ones' resting places, understandably, now feel, in the words of one family, 'cheated'. Now, the peace and solace they used to obtain from that personal, quiet pilgrimage has been permanently and profoundly wrenched from them.

Now every visit reminds them that their loved one had been denied a fundamental dignity due to these unfathomable failings of our public institutions. It reminds them of the failure of the oversight and accountability mechanisms which should have protected them from these egregious and callous actions. It reminds them that they may never receive satisfactory answers as to how and why their loved one was chosen to have their dignity violated in this appalling manner by representatives of our public institutions we should all feel secure in believing only operate with the highest standards of ethical

conduct, accountability and empathy.

Again, in the context of these statements contained in both the government's apology and also in the motion before this Chamber recognising the additional layers of hurt inflicted since January 2025, we must also acknowledge how hurtful and shocking it was and continues to be for many affected families to not have these stolen remains returned to them once identified. An important factor we cannot lose sight of is that those individuals listed in that January 2025 advert died in a manner which warranted an autopsy. That is an indication those deaths were unexpected, potentially suspicious and utterly traumatic for their families.

For too many affected people who have been working for decades to rebuild their lives after the unexpected and traumatic deaths of loved ones, they have been shattered all over again. Not just by the discovery body parts were stolen, but that, despite the theft being confirmed, they were unable to reclaim those parts. Too often I heard instance after instance of people interacting with the coronial processes identifying when asked what their preferred option was regarding the eventual fate of their loved one's remains that they wished for their return, only to have that request denied.

Some members may not be aware, but most people involved in the processes last year were informed they had 10 days in which to advise their preference for what was to happen to their loved one's remains. For some, that involved deeply traumatic conversations with other family members. Some just couldn't face a decision within such an imposed deadline and now find themselves having to live with the regret that they didn't respond in that timeframe perhaps. Some did their best to do so but then discovered their stated preference was not considered practical or appropriate, for whatever reason.

Some merely wished to have the ashes returned to them should the remains be cremated but were informed that due to the small size or nature of the retained sample there wouldn't be sufficient ash to collect. Sadly, bitterly sadly, there were instances where people were unaware the timeframe had expired by which they were to advise their preferred option for their loved one's remains. I am aware of at least one instance where a request for an infant's remains to be returned was discovered too late, that the request had not been made in the expected or appropriate format or to the right entity. This mistake was discovered too late. It is grief upon grief.

The last personal example I will raise during this debate is that of Mr John Santi. Members will be aware of his family's story as John has found the strength to speak publicly about the treatment of his brother Tony Santi. But I will point out those efforts have taken their toll. It is not easy to keep forcing yourself to not only relive the original loss but also the pain since, not just in the privacy of your own head or home but putting it out there publicly. While John is capable of telling his own story, it is worth pointing out that his story is very instructive regarding the recent communication and process difficulties and failings because, although John did succeed in having his brother's brain returned to him and his brothers, it was not an easy or smooth process.

In fact, it was incredibly hard. And it took its toll. I am sure it is still taking its toll. I cannot claim to speak for people who found themselves let down yet again by our systems and processes in such a deeply personal and egregious manner, but I can be angry for them, shocked for them and deeply upset on their behalf.

It hurt to hear. It hurt to watch. I cannot fathom how badly it must have hurt to feel.

I do not present these matters here now with the intent to shock or upset or be gratuitous in any way. I raise them here because many who cannot have asked for this perspective and lived experience to be placed on the public record as part of this parliamentary debate.

I acknowledge there are some affected people for whom grieving is a deeply personal and private process, and even some who do not want to know anything further about this matter, including today's apology. But for others, it is part of their equally personal grieving process to have it clearly acknowledged that their grief has been exacerbated not only by the historic practices recognised but also the more recent ongoing processes, which have denied the return of the stolen body parts and have denied clear answers, options and, by doing so, denied respect.

Trauma-informed and responsive guidelines make it clear that, to be meaningful, not only must formal apologies step up and take responsibility for the wrongs inflicted but they must also commit to ensuring those wrongs can never happen again. We have heard that stated clearly today.

However, for many of those affected by these wrong and unlawful acts, it is difficult to have full confidence in commitments to ensure these actions can never happen again when in their minds there are still too many unanswered questions as to how they happened in the first place.

These human remains were stolen by persons in positions of authority and responsibility acting within our state public institutions, and these practices were normalised by decades of failures of our oversight and accountability systems. As we heard in contributions made in the other place today, there is recognition that these outrages inflicted upon their loved ones were a fundamental breach of human decency - a breach of the standard health ethics which we are led to believe underpin all those decisions and actions taken by that key health fraternity.

I and others warned the government following the public release of the coroner's final findings report on 8 September last year that affected families would not accept that as an end to this matter. How could they? Why should they?

That is why I personally consider it significant that the minister's apology today did include an update detailing the outcomes of further investigatory work undertaken and that there will be referrals to the DPP. These developments will also have a human face and a potential human consequence. But seeing those current accountability processes through to their natural conclusion may provide some meaningful sense of resolution for some. For these people who have felt their loved ones, and they themselves, have been repeatedly told they and their wishes don't matter by public institutions, or those in decision-making positions, they may now feel a little more heard, a little more seen and a little more respected, even if we never receive all the answers to the questions remaining.

Before I begin to conclude, I must address the elephant in the room: as part of a meaningful, trauma-informed and responsive formal apology process, commitments to specific actions and reforms should also be delivered. In this instance, I wish to use this opportunity to place on the record my support for those calls that the government remains open to investigating the delivery of an appropriate financial redress scheme for the currently affected families. Such a commitment delivers on a trauma-informed

principle of avoiding doing further harm. I believe that by forcing people who have already had so much taken from them and their loved ones, to have to argue the case for appropriate compensation does risk inflicting additional harm and grief.

We also know there is a relatively contained cohort of affected people, so an appropriate redress scheme for those impacted by the unlawful actions resulting in the stealing and keeping of human remains without consent will not necessarily involve large or unknown numbers of potential recipients. I recognise that now is not the time or the place to prosecute this particular argument, but I will reiterate that such a forward step is both consistent with the principles stated in the government's apology today and will also progress meaningful reparation for those to whom we are now apologising.

This is a serious story comprised of many individual stories, and none of which have a happy ending. However, hopefully there will be some sense of reclaiming a voice or restoring dignity, of reclaiming the consent that had been ignored by these historic, unlawful and wrong actions. This is a story that jumps across periods of time, blurring perceptions of boundaries between the past and the present, the hidden and the known, the silenced and the now heard, all linked by pain and trauma and broken trust. None of us here would argue that today's belated formal recognition will undo the trauma, hurt, anger, confusion and bewilderment. All we can hope is that today's apology provides recognition that what happened to people's loved ones was abhorrent, beneath us as a community and just plain wrong. The apology may lead to some sense of resolution, some sense of acknowledgement given and received, that it may provide people strength to move forwards and to heal. We should also be upfront and acknowledge today's apology may also provide people the strength to still explore other avenues of restitution which may be available, as they have every right to do.

To conclude, I also wish to take this opportunity to thank and acknowledge the efforts of those Tasmanians who took the courageous step of asking questions following the publication of the 126 names in the newspaper advert on 26 January 2025, by asking questions via my office, via other MPs' offices, through public authorities or in the media. To those people: you should never have been put in that situation. These events should never have happened to your loved ones. You should never have had to pursue justice and answers, let alone have to navigate the bureaucratic and nightmarish maze when doing so. We should not have needed to find ourselves here, now, offering and noting this formal apology from the government, but here we are.

I know the apology which we are noting here will not be enough for some listening. For others, it proved too painful to even attempt to attend or listen. Here, now, I offer my personal apology and acknowledgement of your pain, grief and anger. To add to the government's apology delivered in the Assembly earlier today, I also add my commitment to working, for however long I have the honour to represent my electorate in this place, to ensure lessons are learned, reforms are implemented and this never happens again. I will work to ensure current and future state governments deliver on the commitments made in clause (5) of the government's apology motion today that said this:

... 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 also acknowledge, for those to whom it is important, your right to continue to seek further answers, accountability and redress. I commend the motion to the House.

[8.41 p.m.]

Ms FORREST (Murchison) - Mr President, I would like to make quite a brief contribution on this motion. I want to thank minister Archer, who's in the Chamber with us tonight, for delivering a very thoughtful, intentional and sincere contribution, in my view, a very sincere apology to the people who have been deeply impacted by this tragic situation. I am deeply sorry for what some of our fellow Tasmanians have had to endure. I'm particularly sorry that their grief hasn't ended. Nothing with grief ever ends, but sometimes when you reopen a wound, such as being reopened by this, it takes far longer to heal than the initial wound itself. That's what I hear.

No-one can undo the damage, the harm and the trauma that that was inflicted on these families and the travesty that occurs to their loved ones with no consent, not even any knowledge that it had gone on. The question that comes to me and has been raised with me by some people who've been exposed to this horror is: where were the ethical considerations in all of this? How could it possibly have even been okay to do this? There are no answers to that, but what is clear is that what did happen was unlawful. What did happen was wrong. What did happen should never have happened, and we need to do all that we possibly can to make sure it doesn't happen again or anything like this happens again.

I want to touch briefly on the fact, and the point that I touched on, is that sometimes when you reopen a wound, it takes even longer to heal. One of the reasons that this, I think, has been particularly bad is the manner in which the information came to light, as the member for Nelson has outlined, but also the very distressing way that some family members came to gain knowledge of this event. There are so many better ways that this could be done and I think we need to learn from this. To receive a letter in the mail with no warning at all, to have a heading at the top in bold along the lines of: this letter contains disturbing information, and then not to say to the person, who may well be on their own, may well be elderly, may well be unwell, to ensure that they don't read any further, or that it's inside another envelope you have to open, until they have someone with them that they love and they trust and can provide support.

That's just what happened: people opened these letters and read them with no preparation, no idea what was in this letter, no idea this has happened to their loved one. It doesn't matter whether they were a brother, sister, aunt, uncle, mother, child, baby; to find a letter in your mail like that and just sit there for most of the day looking at it, wondering what it actually means, must have been truly awful. We need to be sure that if there is ever to be a notification of anything, even anywhere near this, this approach is not repeated. There weren't that many people. If they know where the person lives, because they've sent a letter to the next of kin, then surely they could have taken a different approach. That's been terribly difficult. We need to learn from that. There were wishes, and the member for Nelson touched on this, wishes that were not met by some family members who wanted certain things to occur that didn't happen, mainly through lack of communication. Unacceptable.

I not only apologise and say I'm deeply sorry for what happened in the 1960s and 1970s and 1980s when the unlawful acts were undertaken, but also in the way this has been handled with the notification. I do appreciate the effort the minister and the government have gone to, to make a very sensitive apology and to commit to further action to try to do whatever they can to assist people impacted by this. The loss of a

loved one at any time is very difficult. The loss of a child is another thing altogether. To be informed that something dreadful has been done to your child, I don't know how anyone actually gets over that. Well, they don't get over it, they learn to live with it.

I think we need to be really clear that there are a lot of family members out there who are going to take quite a long time now to re-heal, to get to a point where they may have been before with a degree of closure or acceptance that a certain event happened, whether it was the death of a husband, a wife, a sister, brother, spouse, child, anyone. The period of healing that is required now is going to be at least as long and possibly longer. So, I think we, as a parliament, and certainly the government, need to be aware that the provision of ongoing support for these families is going to be much longer than some people may think.

I do hope that we can continue to make sure these people get the support they need; if they continue to seek answers, that we do everything we possibly can to provide answers, and that we do give people the time to heal and be really careful about how we continue to approach this issue because it was a horror at the beginning, and some of the ways this has been dealt with since it came to light have added to the trauma of some of these people.

I'm deeply sorry for both of those outcomes but I do acknowledge the apology that was provided. I thank the government and the minister for taking it seriously and I know that she will continue to do what she can to bring answers to those who are still seeking them, acknowledging that for some there aren't and never will be answers.

[8.49 p.m.]

Ms RATTRAY (McIntyre - Leader for the Government in the Legislative Council) - Mr President, I rise to speak in support of this motion, one that calls on us to recognise, to accept and to take responsibility for a deeply distressing chapter in our history. The government thanks the member for Nelson for bringing this motion forward and the contribution you made this evening. I also recognise the Minister for Health, Mental Health and Wellbeing for providing the formal apology in the House of Assembly and I also acknowledge you in the Chamber this evening.

I'm pleased that members of this place were afforded the opportunity to observe the apology. This is not an easy motion to consider, nor should it be. It requires us to confront practices that fall well short of the values we uphold today. Practices that failed to respect the dignity of the deceased and the rights of their families and, in doing so, eroded the trust placed in public institutions.

As we know, between 1966 and 1991, human organs and tissue samples were removed following coronial autopsies and stolen without the knowledge or consent of families. Every person deserves to be treated with respect in life and in death. Every family deserves transparency, honesty and the opportunity to make informed decisions about their loved ones. What occurred in this period represents a profound failure to uphold those principles.

This motion rightly recognises that these practices were not isolated anomalies, but the result of systemic shortcomings, failures in law, in oversight and in ethical governance. It acknowledges that successive governments did not prevent, identify or adequately address these actions. In supporting this motion, we acknowledge that the systems entrusted to protect dignity and uphold standards did not do so and we recognise the obligation we have as a parliament to confront that failure openly and

without defensiveness.

At the heart of this, we treated people both alive and who have passed with deep disrespect. Most importantly, we must pause to reflect on the human impact. Behind every specimen was a person, behind every person was a family. For many families, learning of these practices has brought profound distress. It is difficult to imagine how it must feel to learn of your loved one being treated in this way.

That harm cannot be undone, but we can acknowledge it, we can listen, and we can ensure that those affected are treated with the compassion and respect they deserve and that we don't repeat these practices. The apology is, therefore, significant. It is a formal recognition of wrongdoing, it is an expression of remorse and it is a necessary step in rebuilding trust and committing to never repeating these wrongs. The motion and the apology send a clear message that we have learned from the past, that we take these failures seriously and we are committed to ensuring they are not repeated.

To the individuals and families affected, I want to say I am so sorry. Your experiences matter, your pain is acknowledged and your voices have contributed to this moment of recognition and accountability. While nothing we can say today can fully heal the hurt that has been caused, the apology represents an important step, one grounded in respect, in truth and in a commitment to ensure that this chapter of history is neither ignored nor repeated. The motion is strongly supported. Thank you.

[8.53 p.m.]

Ms WEBB (Nelson) - Mr President, I just thank members for their contributions, the member for Murchison and the government. It'll be very much appreciated and I very much acknowledge the minister being here with us in the Chamber as well, as part of witnessing our contributions, noting the apology in the other place. I see this as a wonderful potential turning point in how things have been done.

Motion agreed to.