



Budding lawmakers propose having independent youth officers for each school

Teens bid to end the bullying

Student welfare | Hamish Heard

MELBOURNE students have pushed for laws they say would end schoolyard bullying.

As participants in this year's YMCA Youth Parliament – held last week in the Legislative Assembly chamber – the six students from Melbourne University, University High School, RMIT and Victoria University hope their vision for safer playgrounds will eventually become law.

“Bullying is an enormous issue in the community and we strongly believe that we have a solution that will go a long way towards solving it,” group spokeswoman Saadia Nour said.

The 19-year-old Melbourne University arts student and her cohort spent most of the week debating a set of proposed new laws in the hope of gaining support from a majority of the 120 young Victorians sitting in Youth Parliament.

Members are divided into 20 teams of six, with each team researching, drafting and debating a proposed piece of new legislation aimed at addressing a social issue.

Since Victoria's first Youth Parliament in 1987, legislation “passed” has led to the introduction of a host of laws, including the over-the-counter availability of the morning-after pill and the compulsory wearing of bicycle helmets.

Under Ms Nour's group's proposed new law, each Victorian school would employ student support officers based there but under a separate administration. “(They) would provide a confidential service, working with both the victim and the alleged bully to determine any problems and solving them, hopefully before parents and teachers have to become involved,” Ms Nour said.

Other features of the bill include an education campaign and the devel-

opment of a code specifying mandatory consequences for specified acts of bullying.

Fellow aspiring lawmaker Skye McTavish said bullying was being allowed to thrive due to a lack of deterrence in schools. “Everybody has been bullied or even bullied someone else at some stage so our bill aims to make students aware that even the smallest gestures of prejudice can be bullying and carry consequences,” she said.

Parliamentary Secretary to the Premier, Luke Donnellan, said Youth Parliament gave young Victorians a taste of political life.

“Youth Parliament is an excellent opportunity for young people to not only learn how Parliament works, but also to think about issues from a range of different perspectives,” Mr Donnellan said.



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Ramla Hashi debates a point in the Youth Parliament sitting last week.

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