

Statement

The Hon Daniel Andrews MP
Premier



Friday, 24 June 2022

STATEMENT FROM THE PREMIER ON JAMES MERLINO

James Merlino – Deputy Premier, Minister for Education, Minister for Mental Health and Member for Monbulk – has advised me he will not seek re-election in November this year. He will also step down from Cabinet.

While our Government is often referred to as the Andrews Labor Government, nothing we've achieved in infrastructure, in health and education, in equality, in jobs and skills, in any area – would have been possible without the hard work, determination and leadership of the best Deputy any Premier could ever wish for.

Victoria has also never had a better Acting Premier.

In 2021, James seamlessly took over chairing the Cabinet and leading the Government at a difficult time for our state and a tough time for me and my family.

I will forever be grateful for his care and concern but moreover, his competence – allowing me to focus on recovering from very serious injuries, confident, indeed certain, that the state was in the best of hands.

James is a natural leader. Someone of conviction and compassion. His achievements should be a source of pride, but his character defines him. A person of great integrity and ability, a person of principle and a politician who gets things done.

James is a great campaigner because he is part of his local community, and he lives his Labor values every day. For 20 years, I have always relied on his political instincts, his wisdom, his work ethic and his conviction.

There's no one better under pressure, especially when the stakes are high. He always delivers.

When we came to government in 2014, our education system had been decimated. Our schools were failing. Classrooms were falling apart. TAFE campuses were gutted. Savage cuts made it harder on families. And our kids couldn't get the skills they needed to start their careers.

We promised to turn that around and make Victoria the Education State. James has led that charge and delivered on that vision.

In the last eight years, we've upgraded more than 1850 schools. And we're building 100 new ones. Alongside bricks and mortar, James has overseen a string of programs to make our schools fairer, safer places where our youngest Victorians can get the best start in life.

Safe schools. Breakfast clubs. Free dental care for public school students. Camps, sports and excursions funded for kids from lower-income families. A mental health practitioner in every government secondary school.

Victoria was the first Australian state to introduce free, public education. This year, we celebrated 150 years of it – with our state's finest Education Minister at the helm.

I was so proud to stand with James as the final report from the Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System was delivered during an historic joint sitting of Parliament. It was a watershed moment in Victoria's history – once in a generation reform that will change lives, and save lives.

A year on, work is underway on 90 per cent of Royal Commission's recommendations. We're building a mental health system that gives Victorians the care they need, when they need it, close to home.

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I know how committed James is to the re-election of our Government and to see our shared project to make our state better, fairer and stronger continue.

In recognition of his exceptional skills and experience, I have also asked James to stay on in the role of Campaign Chair – a role he has unofficially filled over the last two election campaigns and I am grateful he has accepted.

I wish James, Meagan, Emma, Josh and Sophie – and their ever-expanding collection of animals – all the very best for the years ahead.