

Criminal Justice Legislation (Sexual Violence and Other Matters) Amendment Bill 2024

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**SUBMISSION TO THE INQUIRY ON THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE LEGISLATION (SEXUAL
VIOLENCE AND OTHER MATTERS) AMENDMENT BILL 2024
FROM SOROPTIMIST INTERNATIONAL OF BRISBANE INC**

OVERVIEW AND INTRODUCTION

- **Soroptimist International of Brisbane Inc (SI Brisbane)** welcomes this opportunity to provide input to the development of the Criminal Justice Legislation (Sexual Violence and Other Matters) Amendment Bill 2024. Our membership base consists of business, community and professional women who advocate for all women and girls. As part of the global advocacy organisation, Soroptimist International (SI), our network of around 66 000 members in 118 countries works at local, national, and international levels to educate, empower and enable opportunities for all women and girls. Over a century ago, SI established a women's organisation that proliferated throughout the globe. Our purpose is similar to the Sustainable Development Goal SDG5 for gender equality.
- As an organisation deeply committed to the protection and empowerment of all women and girls in our community, we advocate for legislative reforms that safeguard their rights and ensure their safety. Our position aligns with key international human rights instruments such as the UN Charter for Human Rights and the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), allied conventions and treaties, as well as relevant Australian and Queensland policies and legislation.
- Through this submission, we express our support for the Criminal Justice Legislation (Sexual Violence and Other Matters) Amendment Bill 2024 and offers specific recommendations to enhance implementation. This bill is a crucial step towards enhancing the protection and support for victim-survivors of domestic, family, and sexual violence in Queensland, particularly for women and girls. We commend the efforts of the Queensland Government and the Women's Safety and Justice Taskforce in addressing these pervasive issues through comprehensive legislative reforms.

KEY PROVISIONS AND SUPPORT

- 1. New Offences for Sexual Acts with a Child Aged 16 or 17 Under Care, Supervision, or Authority**

Establishing new offences and expanding existing ones to protect adolescents from exploitation by those in positions of authority is a significant advancement. These amendments align with the recommendations of the taskforce and similar legislation in other Australian jurisdictions.
- 2. Admissibility of Tendency and Coincidence Evidence**

Revising the Evidence Act to allow for the admissibility of tendency and coincidence evidence in sexual offence cases will ensure that the full extent of an offender's behaviour is presented to the court. This change addresses concerns raised by the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse.
- 3. Enhanced Protections for Victim-Survivors During Court Processes**

Introducing alternative arrangements for special witnesses, such as remote testimonies and support persons, will reduce retraumatisation and enable victim-survivors to provide their best evidence.
- 4. Expert Evidence in Sexual Offence Proceedings**

Permitting expert evidence on the nature of sexual offences and the impact of trauma on victim-survivors' behaviour will help dispel myths and stereotypes, leading to fairer trial outcomes.
- 5. Extension and Penalty Increase for Non-Contact Orders**

Extending the maximum duration of non-contact orders from two to five years and increasing penalties for breaches will provide better protection for victim-survivors and demonstrate the seriousness with which these offences are treated.
- 6. Removal of Barriers to Program Participation for Remand Prisoners**

Ensuring that participation in prison programs cannot be used as evidence in proceedings will encourage prisoners to engage in rehabilitation activities, thereby aiding in their reintegration into society.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1. Ensure Comprehensive Implementation and Training**

Provide comprehensive training for law enforcement, judicial officers, and support services on the new offences and evidentiary provisions to ensure consistent application and understanding.
- 2. Increase Funding for Support Services**

Allocate additional funding for victim support services, including counselling, legal assistance, and housing, to aid victim-survivors in their recovery and participation in the justice process.
- 3. Promote Public Awareness Campaigns**

Launch public awareness campaigns to educate the community about the new laws and the importance of protecting adolescents from exploitation and understanding the impact of trauma on victim-survivors.
- 4. Monitor and Evaluate Impact**

Establish mechanisms to monitor and evaluate the impact of the legislative changes on victim-survivors and the criminal justice process, with a focus on continuous improvement and responsiveness to emerging issues.

CONCLUSION

The Criminal Justice Legislation (Sexual Violence and Other Matters) Amendment Bill 2024 represents a significant step forward in protecting and supporting victim-survivors of domestic, family, and sexual violence. We believe it offers a significant opportunity to enhance protections for women and girls. By implementing these reforms, Queensland will lead the way in creating a safer and more just society.



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