

## Penalties and Sentences (Sexual Offences) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2025

**Submission No:** 18  
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### Submitter Comments:

To Whom It May Concern,I write this letter as a survivor of harm, someone who knows all too well how manipulation can be masked as charm, how calculated kindness can be used as a tool to isolate victims, and how good character referencesâ€”when misusedâ€”can become part of that abuse.It is deeply distressing to witness my abuser being upheld as a person of â€œgood characterâ€ in the face of serious harm. These references do not reflect the whole truth; instead, they can become part of a patternâ€”one that grooms not only victims but society itself into believing a lie.Abusers rarely operate in isolation. They build credibility in their communities, cultivate admiration, and strategically present a version of themselves that appears trustworthy, respectable, and even charismatic. This performance is not accidentalâ€”it is deliberate. It creates a smokescreen. It allows them to continue their harm without scrutiny and makes it nearly impossible for victims to come forward without being doubted or dismissed.These so-called character witnesses, whether aware of it or not, become part of the machinery of abuse. Their words are used to paint a picture that erases the lived experiences of survivors like me. They create confusion, doubt, and isolationâ€”exactly what perpetrators rely on to keep their power.To uphold these references in the face of credible allegations is not only inappropriateâ€”it is a form of complicity. It tells survivors that what happened to us doesnâ€™t matter as long as the person who harmed us appeared â€œgoodâ€ to others. It reinforces the very tactics that allowed the harm to occur in the first place.I urge you to consider the broader pattern here. â€œGood characterâ€ is not proven by public politeness or professional successâ€”it is proven by accountability, by empathy, by repair. And if someone refuses to acknowledge the harm theyâ€™ve done, then no number of glowing references should outweigh the voices of those theyâ€™ve hurt.Removing these references is not about punishment. It is about truth. It is about creating a culture where survivors are believed, where manipulation is named, and where no one is above accountability.Please donâ€™t let reputations speak louder than reality.Sincerely,Marianne Loew,Survivor