

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

**Submission No:** 19  
**Submitted by:** Christina Damos  
**Publication:** Making the submission and your name public  
**Attachments:** No attachment

### Submitter Comments:

I am writing to urge the Queensland Government to take immediate steps to abolish the use of character references in court proceedings for individuals convicted of child sexual offences. Character references “typically used to support leniency in sentencing” have no place in cases involving crimes of such severity and lasting trauma as child sexual abuse. These offences are not lapses in judgement or isolated mistakes; they are deliberate, violating acts that cause irreversible harm to the most vulnerable members of our society. Allowing character references in such cases risks shifting focus away from the gravity of the crime and onto the personal reputation or social standing of the perpetrator. It can send a dangerous message to victims, their families, and the broader community that the abuser’s past relationships or societal contributions somehow offset the heinous abuse of a child. This not only retraumatizes survivors but can also deter others from coming forward. The justice system must be unequivocally survivor-focused in cases of child sexual abuse. Every aspect of the legal process must reflect that protecting children and delivering justice for victims takes precedence over preserving the reputations of offenders. Character references, no matter how well-intended, create a platform where a convicted child sex offender’s perceived “good deeds” are weighed against the lifelong trauma of a child. There should be no such scale. The moment a child is abused, that perpetrator forfeits any claim to moral defence through reference to their character. Abolishing this practice would:

- Reaffirm the seriousness of child sexual offences in sentencing decisions
- Ensure courtrooms are focused solely on facts, evidence, and the law “not subjective personal opinions”
- Send a strong message that protecting children outweighs all else
- Prevent further trauma to survivors who may feel silenced or invalidated when their abuser is painted sympathetically in court

I ask the Queensland Government to demonstrate leadership in this area. Let Queensland be a state that puts the rights, safety, and dignity of children above all else “especially above the reputations of those who have violated them.