

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

Submission No: 24
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Publication: Making the submission and your name public
Attachments: No attachment

Submitter Comments:

To the Queensland Government, The current practice of allowing character references in sexual assault and child abuse cases represents a fundamental failure of our justice system to protect survivors and deliver meaningful accountability. This outdated practice must end. Character references serve no legitimate purpose in these cases except to minimize the severity of heinous crimes and shift focus away from the harm caused to survivors. When perpetrators parade character witnesses before the court, they are not addressing their actions or demonstrating genuine remorse—they are orchestrating a performance designed to evoke sympathy and reduce consequences. This practice inflicts additional trauma on survivors who must witness their abuser being praised and humanized while their own suffering is diminished. Survivors report feeling invalidated and retraumatized as they watch friends, family members, and colleagues testify about the "good character" of someone who has caused them profound harm. The implicit message is clear: the perpetrator's reputation matters more than the survivor's pain. The justice system already faces significant challenges in addressing sexual assault and child abuse cases. Conviction rates remain shamefully low, survivors face extensive barriers to reporting, and many cases never reach trial. Character references compound these problems by introducing irrelevant information that serves only to bias proceedings in favour of perpetrators. A person's ability to maintain positive relationships or contribute to their community does not negate their capacity for abuse. History shows us repeatedly that perpetrators often cultivate public personas that mask their private violence. Character references exploit this reality, allowing abusers to weaponise their social standing against those they have harmed. Queensland has an opportunity to lead the nation by eliminating character references in sexual assault and child abuse cases. Such a reform would send a powerful message that our justice system prioritizes survivor welfare over perpetrator sympathy, and that accountability cannot be negotiated away through testimonials about past good deeds. The time for half-measures has passed. We call on the Queensland Government to act decisively to end this harmful practice and create a justice system that truly serves survivors of sexual violence and child abuse. Together, we can build a system that centres justice, not reputation.