

Victims of Crime Assistance (Victims' Advocate Service) Amendment Bill 2026

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Office of the Victims' Commissioner

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Submission to the Justice, Integrity and
Community Safety Committee

30 September 2026

Commissioner's introduction

The Victims of Crime Assistance (Victims' Advocate Service) Amendment Bill 2026 (Qld) establishes the statutory framework for important elements of a new Victims' Advocate Service (VAS) for Queensland. The VAS is proposed to operate as a central, victim-focused entry point for victims of crime seeking information, support and referrals and will be facilitated through a 24/7 telephone line and a website.

I warmly welcome this initiative of the government, which I believe will be well supported by victims of crime. Victims have told me it is overwhelming to navigate various government agencies looking for information, updates and support. Victims often report that agencies provide contradictory information and they struggle to get the referrals they need to the non-government agencies that could provide them with support. If it operates as intended, the VAS will take a huge weight off a victim's shoulders at one of the most difficult points in their life.

The information sharing provisions in the Bill and the ability for that information to be shared with a victim's advocate or representative of their choice represents a huge opportunity to improve the delivery of victim services in Queensland. I commend the 'hub and spoke' architecture provided in the Bill, as it will enable our outstanding non-government victim support agencies to provide the best service possible to victims where they live.

This submission draws the Committee's attention to some possible sources of confusion for victims of crime caused by a multitude of different definitions of 'victim' across the statute book. I respectfully ask the Committee to consider this element of my submission together with my submissions on the Justice Legislation (Strengthening Victims' Rights) Amendment Bill 2026 and the Protecting Queenslanders from Dangerous Prisoners and Strengthening Victims' Rights Amendment Bill 2026.

I also ask the Committee to consider whether it would be appropriate to include a statutory review provision in the Bill to provide for a review of the VAS by the Queensland Audit Office after two years. It is important that the VAS model is delivered in a way that does not duplicate existing victim support services. An independent review will provide victims with transparency and confidence that resources are being allocated effectively and efficiently.

Lastly, I ask the Committee to note that there will still be service gaps left to fill once the VAS is implemented. This is a very welcome first step on a long but important road.



Kate Connors

Victims' Commissioner

Role of the Victims' Commissioner

The role of the Victims' Commissioner is established under the *Victims' Commissioner and Sexual Violence Review Board Act 2024 (Qld)* (VCSVRB Act). My role is to protect and promote the rights and needs of victims of crime. My statutory functions include:

- providing information to victims of crime to help them navigate the criminal justice system
- dealing with complaints under the Charter of Victims' Rights
- conducting systemic reviews
- listening to victims to hear about their own, lived experiences
- advocating for victims' rights by making recommendations and providing advice to government and non-government entities about improvements to policy, practices, procedures and systems to uphold the rights of victims and better meet their needs
- monitoring the implementation of recommendations.

Under section 6 of the VCSVRB Act, a victim includes a person who suffers harm because a criminal offence (including domestic violence) is committed against the person. This includes:

- people who have a criminal offence committed against them directly
- family members or dependants of a person who have a criminal offence committed against them
- people who are harmed because they helped another person who had a criminal offence committed against them
- witnesses of crimes.¹

The VCSVRB Act defines harm as including physical, psychological or emotional harm, damage to or loss of property, and financial or economic loss.² This definition recognises the range of impacts that a crime can have on an individual.

Review of the Charter of Victims' Rights

In February 2025, the Office of the Victims' Commissioner (OVC) commenced a systemic review of the Charter of Victims' Rights, pursuant to my functions under section 9(a) of the VCSVRB Act. The review aims to ensure the Charter of Victims' Rights effectively promotes and protects the rights of diverse victims of crime, in line with recommendations by the Women's Safety and Justice Taskforce³ and the Queensland Parliament's Legal Affairs and Safety Committee's Inquiry into support provided to victims of crime.⁴

The review is being informed by engagement with victims of crime, their advocates, family members and professionals who work with victims of crime. I will provide a report to the Minister for Youth Justice and Victim Support and Minister for Corrective Services by December 2026. More information about the review can be found on the OVC's [website](#).

This submission is informed, in part, by the views and experiences shared with the OVC thus far, as well as the victims who have provided feedback or made complaints to the OVC.

Victims' Commissioner's submission on the Bill

The principal objective of the Victims of Crime Assistance (Victims' Advocate Service) Amendment Bill 2026 (Qld) (the Bill) is to establish a statutory framework for a new Victims' Advocate Service (VAS) that will operate as a central, victim-focused entry point for victims of crime seeking information, support and referrals throughout the criminal justice process.⁵ The establishment of the VAS is a Queensland Government election commitment and it has an allocated budget of \$50 million over five years from 2025-26.⁶

The Bill seeks to address the current fragmentation of victim support services across multiple government agencies by:

- improving victims' access to information and support services
- providing coordinated navigation assistance across government systems
- reducing the need for victims to repeatedly recount traumatic experiences
- enabling more effective information sharing between government entities
- ensuring appropriate privacy and confidentiality safeguards
- extending support to a broader category of victims, including persons whose property has been taken, destroyed or damaged through an offence.⁷

The Bill also expands the purposes of *the Victims of Crime Assistance Act 2009* (Qld) (the VOCAA) beyond financial assistance for victims of violence to include assisting victims and related persons to access information and services.⁸

The Bill amends the VOCAA by inserting a new Chapter 3A, which formally establishes the legislative basis for the VAS⁹ and provides the chief executive responsible for victim support with delegable¹⁰ statutory functions to:

- assist victims to obtain information to which they are legally entitled
- connect victims with services provided by government and non-government organisations
- refer victims to appropriate support services

- provide information about victim services and the criminal justice system.¹¹

The Bill creates an information-sharing scheme intended to reduce administrative burden and improve agency coordination.¹² This will enable the VAS to act on behalf of victims, with their consent.¹³ Under proposed new ss 137H-137O:

- victims or eligible representatives may authorise the chief executive to act on their behalf¹⁴
- the chief executive may request information from government entities where the victim is legally entitled to receive that information¹⁵
- government entities may provide the information either directly to the victim or to the chief executive¹⁶
- existing legislative restrictions on disclosure are overridden only to the extent necessary to facilitate disclosure to the chief executive or eligible representative where the information could otherwise have lawfully been provided to the victim.¹⁷

I warmly support the objectives of this Bill. Victims have told me the silos between government agencies and non-government victim support organisations are a source of constant frustration. Victims will welcome this effort at harmonising information and providing greater navigational support in their journey.

Definition of victim

The Bill includes a broad definition of a 'victim' who will be able to access the support pathways administered by the VAS. The new definition includes:

- victims recognised under the VOCAA
- persons whose property has been taken, destroyed or damaged through an offence or alleged offence
- persons recognised as eligible to be registered on the eligible persons register under the *Corrective Services Act 2006* (Qld)
- persons recognised as eligible to be registered on the eligible persons register under the *Youth Justice Act 1992* (Qld)
- persons entitled to receive patient-related information under s 318(1) of the *Mental Health Act 2016* (Qld).¹⁸

I respectfully request the Committee note my corresponding comments on the definition of 'victim' included in my submissions to this Committee for its inquiry into the Justice Legislation (Strengthening Victims' Rights) Amendment Bill 2026 and the Protecting Queenslanders from Dangerous Prisoners and Strengthening Victims' Rights Amendment Bill 2026.

While I welcome the policy intent of providing a broad definition of victim who can access the VAS, I again raise concerns about this broader definition being enacted without regard to the existing victims' rights framework under the VCSVRB Act. Multiple different definitions of 'victim' across multiple pieces of legislation risks creating a legislative landscape that causes practical challenges for victims, my office and agencies responsible for administering victim-related rights and services.

My submission to the Committee's inquiry into the Justice Legislation (Strengthening Victims' Rights) Amendment Bill 2026 provided examples of some practical consequences of the lack of alignment created by that Bill. I supplement those examples with compounding additional consequences created by this Bill should both Bills be passed:

- a person in a close personal relationship with a victim would be entitled to make a Victim Impact Statement (VIS). However, they would not be entitled to access the VAS or have the Charter right to be told about the details of relevant court processes or to be protected from unnecessary contact, or violence or intimidation by the accused during a court proceeding. Whether that person was entitled to financial assistance under the VOCCA would depend on whether the close personal relationship (undefined in the Justice Legislation (Strengthening Victims' Rights) Amendment Bill 2026) came within meaning of 'close family member' which *is* defined under the VOCCA.
- a victim of a property offence would be entitled to make a VIS and could access the VAS. However, they would not have the Charter right to be told about the outcome of the proceeding or the ability to be added to a victims' register to learn about the offender's release.
- a grandchild of the victim would be entitled to make a VIS and be able access the VAS. However, they would not be eligible to make a Charter complaint if they weren't told about their entitlement to make a VIS or if they were treated with a lack of respect, dignity and compassion by the VAS.

I appreciate that there are sound policy rationales for some differences in the support victims can access across different services. However, I feel it is important to provide these examples to the Committee to give a sense of how victims of crime will feel when they must make sense of these differing definitions.

The overwhelming feedback that victims and those that support them provided to my office as part of the Charter review is that victims seek consistency in the way the government treats them as a victim. One of the objectives of the VAS is to address a feeling of overwhelm from victims who confront a maze of bureaucratic processes to obtain recognition, rights and entitlements - that is an objective I wholeheartedly support. My concern is that this multitude of definitions may work against that objective.

It will be difficult for my office to explain why only *some* victims who feel they haven't been treated with courtesy, compassion, respect and dignity¹⁹ by the VAS will be able to make a complaint to me. I anticipate that victims will be confused and frustrated when we inevitably have to refuse their complaints because they sit outside our legislative functions. I also need to acknowledge that my office is not currently resourced to provide a client engagement and complaint service to the breadth of victims covered in definitions of victim in either this Bill or the Justice Legislation (Strengthening Victims' Rights) Amendment Bill 2026.

Victim representation by nominees and recognised persons – architecture for a hub and spoke model

The Bill allows victims to nominate another person or entity to act on their behalf in dealing with the VAS.²⁰ These provisions in the Bill also recognises particular representatives including:

- parents and guardians of child victims
- attorneys acting under an enduring power of attorney under the *Powers of Attorney Act 1998* (Qld)
- guardians appointed under the *Guardianship and Administration Act 2000* (Qld).²¹

This is one of the most important features of the legislation as it provides the architecture for a 'hub and spoke' model of service delivery. It ensures that victim support and advocacy organisations already providing important services tailored to individual victims' needs across Queensland will benefit from the information sharing protocols contained in the Bill and will help them to advocate for the needs of the victims they support.

It also provides appropriate flexibility for victims who require additional assistance to claim their rights and entitlements.

I am pleased to see the provisions also clearly articulate the process for withdrawing a nomination. This is particularly important to provide victims with agency and choice about how they receive information in matters that can often take years to be finalised.

Importance of facilitating service integration and avoiding service duplication

The information sharing protocols between government agencies and non-government services that will be able to be facilitated by this Bill create a valuable and exciting opportunity for the delivery of victim support in Queensland. Care needs to be taken in the delivery of the VAS to ensure that it integrates, not duplicates, the existing victim support services provided by government and non-government agencies.

While the features of the operational model are not part of this Bill, the Minister's explanatory speech to the Bill outlined some of the proposed features:

- 24-hour, seven day-a-week telephone call centre
- website providing information about victims' rights, the justice process and available support
- connection to existing support services
- helping a victim to seek updates about their case
- helping a victim understand how to navigate financial assistance
- creation of victim advocate service liaison officers across government.²²

I am pleased that in the explanatory speech the Minister also provided an assurance that there was not an intention to replace the specialist victim support services that already exist across Queensland.²³ The VAS could not replace many of the essential services provided by existing services, for example it could not provide:

- personalised support to children, young people and adults during court proceedings²⁴
- in-person trauma-informed specialist system navigation assistance to victims of domestic and family violence²⁵, non-fatal strangulation²⁶ and sexual violence²⁷
- family support, peer support, court support and media liaison support for victims of homicide²⁸ and serious violence.²⁹

I know from my interactions with victims how deeply they value the service provided by our non-government victim support organisations, which provide safety and tailored support to victims where they live. It is important that, consistent with the hub and spoke architecture provided in the Bill, the VAS functions primarily as a coordination gateway into these organisations rather than try to directly provide services that are already being delivered.

I also bring to the Committee's attention that there is also some overlap with my own statutory functions to publish information in relation to the criminal justice system and promote the rights of victims.³⁰ My office currently hosts a range of important education and information products including our pathway products that provide victims with trauma-informed information about their journey through the justice and victim support systems.³¹ In initial conversations between my office and the Department of Youth Justice and Victim Support (DYJVS), I have been assured that the intention is for the VAS website to provide a link to the content on the OVC website rather than move this content over to the VAS website. I endorse this highly appropriate course by DYJVS, not only because it avoids duplication but because an important function of our office is to provide information and advice that is independent of government.

I would urge the Committee to consider recommending the inclusion of a statutory review provision in the Bill that would provide for a review of the VAS two years after the commencement of the legislation by the Queensland Audit Office. The clause could provide for a review of how the VAS scheme is operating and how it interacts with victim service delivery across government and non-government organisations. This would ensure service delivery is not duplicated and services are being delivered efficiently and effectively.

Important service gaps for victims remain even after the VAS is implemented

While I applaud the implementation of the VAS as an important step forward for improved service delivery for victims of crime in Queensland, there are still significant service gaps that the VAS will not fill.

A significant gap that I have previously highlighted in a submission to the State Development, Infrastructure and Works Committee on the Criminal Code (Dangerous Driving) and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2026 is support provided to victims of dangerous driving offences causing death.

The Queensland Homicide Victims Support Group (QHVSOG) is the primary not-for-profit organisation that supports victims in the aftermath of homicide in Queensland. QHVSOG is funded by the Government to do vital work providing intensive wrap-around and ongoing support for victims in circumstances where an offender is charged with murder or manslaughter. However, this funding does not extend to the provision of support for victims and families affected by a death resulting from other criminal offences, including dangerous driving causing death.

This means victims who have lost a family member because of a dangerous driving offence will continue to be left without the specialist support they require – not just in

the immediate aftermath of the incident, but throughout the criminal justice process. In New South Wales this support gap is filled through the Road Trauma Support Group ([Road Trauma Support Group NSW](#)). This model could be replicated in Queensland, with appropriate funding to QHVSG, to address the significant gap in support and ensure victims affected by fatal road offences receive specialised end-to-end support. This could include intensive case management and financial assistance to help victims navigate the traumatic aftermath and ongoing impacts of the offence. I have seen firsthand the difference in the journey of victims supported by QHVSG and victims of dangerous driving causing death who do not receive this type of support. It is night and day, and it feels deeply unfair.

This is just one gap, there are unfortunately many others. There is not equitable access to sexual assault support services across the state and there is also very little specialised support for victims of child sexual abuse. These gaps are worthy of further attention from the government.

Endnotes

¹ *Victims' Commissioner and Sexual Violence Review Board Act 2024 (Qld)* ('VCSVRB Act') s 6.

² VCSVRB Act s 6.

³ Women's Safety and Justice Taskforce. *Hear her voice: Women and girls' experiences across the criminal justice system* (Report 2, 2021) 14 <<https://www.publications.qld.gov.au/ckan-publications-attachments-prod/resources/5b70727a-cc0e-4e08-8eda-e1434e6e0814/wsijt-hear-her-voice-report-2-volume-1.pdf?ETag=e7ff438db3d61317be5d683ce05e7023>>.

⁴ Legal Affairs and Safety Committee, *Inquiry into support provided to victims of crime* (Report No. 48 to 57th Parliament, 2023) vi <<https://www.parliament.qld.gov.au/Work-of-the-Assembly/Tabled-Papers/docs/5723t648/5723t648-b045.pdf>>.

⁵ Explanatory Notes, Victims of Crime Assistance (Victims' Advocate Service) Amendment Bill 2026 (Qld), 1.

⁶ State of Queensland, 'Youth Justice, Victim Support and Corrections Budget to Help Deliver Safety Where You Live' (Joint Statement, The Hon David Janetzki, Treasurer, Minister for Energy and Minister for Home Ownership, and The Hon Laura Gerber, Minister for Youth Justice and Victim Support and Minister for Corrective Services, 24 June 2025) <<https://statements.qld.gov.au/statements/102882>>.

⁷ State of Queensland, 'Youth Justice, Victim Support and Corrections Budget to Help Deliver Safety Where You Live' (Joint Statement, The Hon David Janetzki, Treasurer, Minister for Energy and Minister for Home Ownership, and The Hon Laura Gerber, Minister for Youth Justice and Victim Support and Minister for Corrective Services, 24 June 2025) 5 <<https://statements.qld.gov.au/statements/102882>>; State of Queensland, *Parliamentary Debates*, Legislative Assembly, 16 September 2026, 2873 (Laura Gerber, Minister for Youth Justice and Victim Support and Minister for Corrective Services).

⁸ Victims of Crime Assistance (Victims' Advocate Service) Amendment Bill 2026 (Qld) cl 5.

⁹ Victims of Crime Assistance (Victims' Advocate Service) Amendment Bill 2026 (Qld) cl 6.

¹⁰ Victims of Crime Assistance (Victims' Advocate Service) Amendment Bill 2026 (Qld) proposed s 137E.

¹¹ Victims of Crime Assistance (Victims' Advocate Service) Amendment Bill 2026 (Qld) proposed s 137D; Explanatory Notes, Victims of Crime Assistance (Victims' Advocate Service) Amendment Bill 2026 (Qld) 4.

¹² Explanatory Notes, Victims of Crime Assistance (Victims' Advocate Service) Amendment Bill 2026 (Qld), 1.

¹³ Explanatory Notes, Victims of Crime Assistance (Victims' Advocate Service) Amendment Bill 2026 (Qld), 1.

¹⁴ Victims of Crime Assistance (Victims' Advocate Service) Amendment Bill 2026 (Qld) proposed s 137H.

¹⁵ Victims of Crime Assistance (Victims' Advocate Service) Amendment Bill 2026 (Qld) proposed s 137M.

¹⁶ Victims of Crime Assistance (Victims' Advocate Service) Amendment Bill 2026 (Qld) proposed s 137N.

¹⁷ Victims of Crime Assistance (Victims' Advocate Service) Amendment Bill 2026 (Qld) proposed s 137N(4)-(5).

¹⁸ Victims of Crime Assistance (Victims' Advocate Service) Amendment Bill 2026 (Qld) proposed s 137A

¹⁹ VCSVRB Act, Schedule 1 *Charter of Victims' Rights*, Division 1.

²⁰ Victims of Crime Assistance (Victims' Advocate Service) Amendment Bill 2026 (Qld) proposed ss 137F-137G.

²¹ Victims of Crime Assistance (Victims' Advocate Service) Amendment Bill 2026 (Qld) proposed s 137A.

²² State of Queensland, *Parliamentary Debates*, Legislative Assembly, 16 September 2026, 2873 (Laura Gerber, Minister for Youth Justice and Victim Support and Minister for Corrective Services).

²³ State of Queensland, *Parliamentary Debates*, Legislative Assembly, 16 September 2026, 2873 (Laura Gerber, Minister for Youth Justice and Victim Support and Minister for Corrective Services).

²⁴ See information about the service provision of PACT <<https://pact.org.au/our-impact/>>.

²⁵ See information about the service provision of CADA <<https://cada.org.au/how-we-can-help-you/>>.

²⁶ See information about the service provision of the Red Rose Foundation <<https://www.redrosefoundation.com.au/>>.

²⁷ See information about the service provision of the Townsville Sexual Assault Support Service <<https://www.thewomenscentre.org.au/services/sexual-assault-support-service/>>.

²⁸ See information about the service provision of the Queensland Homicide Victim Support Group <<https://qhvs.org.au/>>.

²⁹ See information about the service provision of the Voice for Victims' Foundation <<https://voiceforvictims.org.au/about-us/#how-we-help>>.

³⁰ VCSVRB Act s9(e) and (f).

³¹ See for example the Sentencing Pathway for Victims <<https://www.victimskommissioner.qld.gov.au/support/understanding-sentencing>>.